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SCIENCE FICTION BY TOP WRITERS

FEATURING
SECOND LANDING

AN INTERPLANETARY NOVEL
by Murray Leinster

THE AGILE ALGOLIAN

A MANNING DRACO NOVEL
by Kendell Foster Crossen

DAUGHTER

A NEW STORY
by Philip José Farmer

WINTER 25c



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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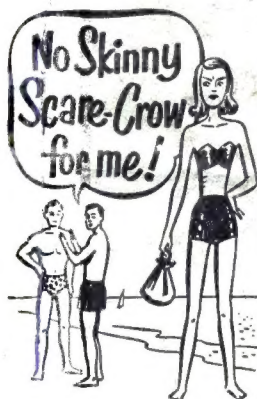
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dangerous drugs... you eat it like candy! Yet... if you were to have this same prescription compounded to your order, it would cost you many times more. However, through this introductory offer, you can obtain 4-way MORE-WATE tablets... a full 10 days' supply... for just \$1.00 or a 30 day supply for only \$2.98, plus a 10 day supply free, with an absolute money-back guarantee! Yes, try MORE-WATE for TEN DAYS... and if not entirely delighted with weight gained, return the unused supply for full refund! You've nothing to lose... and weight to gain! Act now! Stop being the guy or the gal that everyone calls "skinny." Stop being the guy or the gal who dreads

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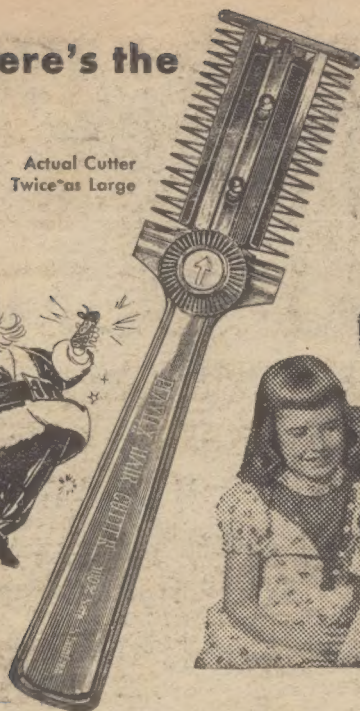
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THRILLING

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STORIES

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How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey



The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there. Who knows, I might still be bumming Chesterfields instead of selling them.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it fast or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count

above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

I.C.S. made the impossible—easy!

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

IT WAS only yesterday that aeronautical engineers were approaching the sound barrier with trepidation; today Mach 1, or the speed of sound, is already old hat. And Mach numbers running up to 4 are being tossed around with a recklessness which would have seemed impossible only months ago.

Breaking through the sound barrier seemed to be a prerequisite to space travel in everyone's mind, not only because of the necessary attainment of high speed, but because aircraft began to act strangely under several kinds of unknown stresses and all these factors had to be studied.

Horsepower Plus

Foremost was the question of horsepower. Where it doesn't take too much to push a plane at normal speeds, it takes more than 20,000 horsepower to get it past Mach 1. To get it past Mach 1.5 the power would have to exceed 160,000 and if this continues in geometric ratio you can see what is involved.

Another thing that increases, though not so sharply, with speed, is the heat of friction. At Mach 1 the heat is under 100 degrees Fahrenheit, at Mach 4 it is over 1200 degrees. This would cook a human pilot in short order. Today aircraft designers are working on compact refrigeration units to cool the planes and they are already in use on advanced ships which exceed the speed of sound. At Mach 2, the heat would be about 300 degrees, which is not comfortable, to put it mildly.

Power and heat were not the only obstacles. There was the barrier of air itself. At less than sound speed a plane pushes through the air readily enough. But at the speed of sound, air molecules pile up in front of the ship, creating shock waves which might break up a plane, or lock the controls so that the pilot could not move them. The effects of compressing air were all new and frightening in a field where a mistake

usually meant a disintegrated plane and a dead pilot.

Most trouble was encountered in the 700 mile an hour range, where some of the air moving over the ship might be traveling faster than sound and some of it slower. This created all kinds of strange flight problems which could only be studied in actual flight. Wind tunnel tests were not satisfactory, as they seemed to "choke up" at speeds approaching sound.

The horsepower problem was solved by the development of jet and rocket engines with a switch away from the familiar gasoline piston engine. This older type never could deliver more than 5000 horsepower. And the propeller which went with it could not pull an airplane much over 450 miles an hour. Also, the efficiency of a propeller falls off as the speed increases.

A Matter of Thrust

In the case of the jets and rockets, however, the reverse is true. Not only is more power initially available, but the thrust increases as the craft gains speed. For example: a pound of thrust at 375 miles per hour equals just about one horsepower. At 750 miles per hour it equals two horsepower and at 1000 miles an hour it equals three horsepower. Thus the faster a rocket ship flies, the more power it is generating, which seems like a neat and automatic solution to the problem of the geometrically increased need for power at higher and higher speeds. Of course the fuel problem still remains to be solved.

In the meantime, a mantle of secrecy has fallen over the experimental ships now being flown, built and designed. But this much is certain: out of it will come rocket ships which will bypass the sonic barrier completely and be designed for slipping through the atmos-

(Continued on page 123)



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

*You Can Influence Others
With Your Thinking!*

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—get across to him or her your ideas? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have

privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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Second



Second

They came from Earth to play a game of hide-and-peek
with aliens and atom bombs. . . .



I

The exploring-ship Franklin made its first landing on a remarkable wide beach on the western coast of Chios, the largest land-mass on Thalassia. Using the longest axis of the continent as a base, and the pointed end as seen from space as 0° , this beach bears 246° from the median point of the base-line. . . . The Franklin later berthed inland some four miles 360° from Firing Plaza Number One on the chart. There is a pleasant savannah here, with a stream of water apparently safe for drinking.—*Astrographic Bureau Publication 11297, Appendix to Space Pilot Vol. 460, Sector XXXIV, pg. 58-59.*

IT WAS not plausible that Brett Carstairs should find a picture of a girl, to all appearances human, in millenia-old ruins on a planet some hundreds of light-years from earth. But the whole affair was unlikely,

Landing

A Novel by MURRAY LEINSTER

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Landing

A Novel by MURRAY LEINSTER

beginning with the report of the exploring ship which caused the Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition in the first place. Had it not been for the photographs and the ceramic artifacts, nobody would have believed that report. It simply was not credible that another intelligent race should have ever existed in the galaxy. No hint of extra-terrestrial reasoning beings had been found in two centuries of exploration. But the exploration-ship's stilted narrative didn't stop at one impossibility. It said that on the twin worlds Thalassia and Aspasia, revolving perpetually about each other as they trained the satellite-sun Rubra on its course, not one, but *two*, intelligent races had existed. It offered some evidence that some thousands of years before they had fought, bitterly and mercilessly, and that they had exterminated each other in an interplanetary atomic war which lasted only days or even hours. It was hard to believe.

But the picture of the girl was more impossible than anything else. Brett didn't believe it. He didn't quite dare mention it until the thing was all over.

He didn't find it at the very beginning, of course. There were preliminaries. The Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition was handicapped from the start by the lack of funds. The general public was much more excited about colonization of nearby planetary systems than research on a planet that wouldn't be colonized in a thousand years. So the Expedition was very small—no more than a dozen members altogether—and it landed on Thalassia from an Ecology Bureau ship. It would be picked up in six months or so. Probably. Even then, what it found might not matter to anybody else.

Brett joined up because it was his only chance at adventure and because his hobby warranted his inclusion in the staff. He could drive a flier, of course—everybody could—but he'd specialized in palaeotechnology, the study of ancient industrial processes. If there really had been an intelligent race or races out in space, he would make better

guesses than most at how its machinery operated and what its factories produced. But his personal reason for going was an anticipatory feeling of excitement at the idea of being left with a small group of human beings on a planet where even the skies were unfamiliar, and where they would be more terribly alone than any similar group had ever been before.

That excitement lasted during the tedious journey in overdrive and during the long approach to planetary landing distance after the Ecology Bureau ship was back in normal space in the Elektra system. When it went into atmosphere on Thalassia and its repulsors droned above the illimitable waters of Thalassia's ocean, Brett watched with fascinated eyes. They had a twenty-thousand-mile reach in which to build up to mountainous heights. At this season of the twin planets' year, they had the equivalent of trade winds to urge them on.

When they reached the shore of Chios, the planet's only continent, they were three-hundred feet high. Brett could see the swirling maelstroms and dramatic tumult of the struggle between sea and land. He remembered that at the very edge of the wave-washed area there were to be found the only living moving things on the continent. They were crablike marine forms which scuttled out of the water to forage, then darted back to the tumultuous coastal foam.

THE spaceship settled lower and lower—and the word went around that the radar-beacon on Chios wasn't working—and hovered over Firing Plaza Number One and the ruined refugee settlement nearby. It then descended gently at the landing place which the exploring-ship had advised for later visitors.

It was a pleasant savannah, and the stream ran clear as crystal. But the Ecology Bureau ship had been grudgingly loaned, and it had urgent business

elsewhere. It opened its cargo-ports and the Expedition's supplies went out to ground in a swiftly-flowing stream. They piled up mountainously, so it seemed, and at that they were not too complete. The biggest crates were two atmosphere-fliers and a short range-rocket. The fuel for the rocket made a bigger heap than all the rest of the equipment put together. There were plastic tarpaulins, houses to be unfolded and braced back—but at least they weren't inflatable shelters—and a spare

enough. The small stream at the landing-place made pleasant liquid sounds. But that was all. No insect stirred or whirled or stridulated. No bird sang. No squirrel barked, nor any reasonable facsimile of any noise made by any living creature came to the ears of the Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition. The only sounds were the voices of the Expedition members themselves, and the noises they made with the boxes and crates, and the breeze and the dull booming of the thundering surf to west-

PERSONAL TOUCH

WHEN Man finally pushes off into outer space, it wouldn't surprise us at all to find Murray Leinster going along as official advisor. Few men have created and populated so many planets or become as familiar with the outer reaches and the incredible things which might happen to Man when he gets there. **SECOND LANDING** takes up the possibility of one thing happening to Man which is not so incredible—in fact is likely—but is no less frightening for that. Our Mr. Leinster, however, does not despair. He retains faith in intelligence, man's or anyone else's. It's a nice thought.

—The Editor

beacon. But that was all. The unloading took under two hours.

Then the skipper of the Ecology Bureau shop asked politely if there was anything else. Minutes later the cargo-ports closed and the personnel lock shut, and the ship's repulsors began to drone. It heaved up slowly until it was a few thousand feet high and then went into interplanetary drive and plummeted toward the sky. It would come back in six months, most likely, or another ship would come in its stead, and the Expedition would have to be ready to leave.

That was when Brett Carstairs realized the silence on Thalassia. The Expedition's members set to work to make camp. There was a breeze, and the vegetation was reasonably familiar in smell at least—chlorophyll and its associated compounds are found on the oxygen planets of all sol-type stars—and the leaves on the trees rustled naturally

ward. Brett caught himself listening uneasily.

"I didn't realize" he said ruefully to Kent, at the other end of the crate that would presently be furniture—"that it would sound so lonely."

"It's been lonely here for a good many thousand years," Kent answered phlegmatically, "since the races on these twin planets killed each other off."

Kent set down his end of the crate, and he and Brett began to assemble the furnishings of the Expedition's housing. All about them was jungle. The clearing in which they worked had a ground-cover like ivy running on the ground. It was broadleaved instead of narrowleaved as grasses are, and Brett had a feeling that there could be crawling things under it.

But there couldn't. The report of the exploring-ship was specific. There had once been a high civilization on both

here and on the twin-planet *Aspasia*, which was invisible from where they were. Some eight thousand years before they'd battled to the death across the quarter-million miles of space that separated them. Fission bombs with cobalt cases poisoned the air of *Thalassia*; at the same time fusion bombs from *Thalassia* blasted the oasis cities of its twin-world to lakes of molten glass. Anyhow, there wasn't a living, air-breathing creature on *Thalassia* now.

The air was no longer radioactive. Carbon-14 and Cobalt-60 determinations timed the deadly war at very close to eight thousand earth-years before. Now there was vegetation and to spare, and the ocean swarmed with marine organisms from plankton up to fish. But there was no moving creature left on the land.

Brett labored on. The atmosphere on *Thalassia* was depressing. It was a dead world despite its forests and jungles. Everything that had eyes or wings or a throat—even teeth to bite or stings to sting with—had died aeons ago with the doomed creatures whose friable skeletons the exploring-ship had found about the firing-plaza. They'd been killed by the bombs from the other planet which was forever invisible from here. They'd been murdered. Butchered. The forests had no purpose with no animals to live in them. There was a feeling of grief in the air, as if even the trees mourned.

Brett wanted to go over to the firing plaza and see where living things had been, even if the only knowledge about them was that they had died in the act of firing giant rockets to avenge the extermination of their race. When they died, *Thalassia* was already a charnel-house.

NOW all was quiet. Terribly quiet. The Expedition members braced their houses and moved the laboratory equipment inside, and uncrated their fliers and tied them down, and ran their power lines and dug their refrigeration-

pits and put in sanitary facilities and set their water-recovery plant at work. It was safer to condense moisture from the air than to use local water supplies which might carry undesirable trace-elements.

Brett began to worry that it would be too late to go to the firing-plaza before dark. Then he remembered. He looked up at the sky. It was mostly blue, but speckled. There was a dull red pinpoint of light near the horizon. It wasn't *Elektra*, the sun and center of gravity of this system. It was *Rubra*, the red dwarf, the satellite-sun, the size of *Sol's* Jupiter, which shared an orbit with the twin planets. They were in Trojan relationship to it, sixty degrees behind as it sped sullenly about its primary. *Elektra* itself was not visible. But there was no night.

Off to what ought to be the west there was a spotty bright luminosity in the sky. It was the star-clustered *Canis Venitici*, on whose fringe this solar system lay. And the multiple suns of the cluster swarmed so closely and shone so brightly at the cluster's heart that even twenty-eight lightyears away they gave *Thalassia* more light than its own and proper sun.

There would be no night on *Thalassia*.

Brett had known it, of course, but all the same he was relieved. A dead planet is gloomy enough in the daytime, with all its vegetation grieving that it has no purpose. At night it would be intolerable. And even in the daytime it would be wise to keep one's mind busy.

Brett kept his mind busy. He had driven pegs and was tying down the tarpaulin over a mound of crates when he saw the heap of dirt. It did not have any ground-cover on it. It was piled up. It had been rained on, but it was freshly dug. Brett pounded two more pegs, and painstakingly knotted the ropes that would hold the tarpaulin in any wind. Then he jumped. Kent, by that time, was pounding in more pegs on the other side of the pile of stores.

Brett stared at the piled-up dirt. It was surprisingly Earthlike. The top of the ground was dark humus from rotted vegetation, and six or eight inches down it should be clay, very much as in a fresh-dug hole on Earth. But there shouldn't be any fresh-dug hole on Thalassia! Nothing lived here. Nothing!

But there was a fresh-dug hole in the ground, with clay on top of the thrown-out humus.

Brett stopped driving pegs and went over. He stared down, and felt himself growing very pale and sick. There were scraps of paper—human-made paper—at the bottom. There were traces of the rotted debris that any group of humans will discard, but which humans automatically put out of sight before they leave any stopping-place. This savannah had been the berthing-place of the exploring-ship *Franklin*. This was where they had buried their trash. Something had dug it up.

More, something had very carefully sorted it out, as human scientists sort out the rubbish-heap—the kitchen-midden—of a forgotten culture to find out what made it tick.

Something had carefully examined an exploring-ship's kitchen-midden to find out what sort of beings human beings might be. Men from Earth wouldn't have needed to do that. They knew.

Something intelligent and curious, but not from Earth, had wanted to know about men, on a planet where nothing had lived for eight millenia. But something had been alive on the dead planet Thalassia. It had wanted to know about the men who'd camped here from the exploring-ship two years before.

Brett was white when he called Kent to look. Kent looked phlegmatically down into the hole and said:

"That's the *Franklin's* garbage-pit. Why'd they dig it up again?"

Brett said:

"They didn't. Somebody else dug it up. Lately. It's been rained on, but nothing's grown over it. In two years it would have been washed flat and covered

over. This was dug long after the *Franklin* left. Recently—probably within days—just before we arrived."

He shouted, and the nearby trees echoed his voice with a chilling resonance. Halliday, the official head of the Expedition, came fretfully to see what was the matter. Brett showed him. Halliday stared blankly for a second. He even began to frown because Brett had called him for nothing. But then the breath went out of him with a curious whooshing sound. His face went quite gray.

"And the ship's gone!" he said irritably. "It can't take word back! There is life here after all—intelligent life! And we're at its mercy!"

Which was absolutely true. Because this was strictly an archaeological expedition to work on two worlds which had committed suicide together. So there were no defensive weapons in the Expedition's equipment. Heat-guns, yes. They were handy for lighting fires. There were some explosives for shifting rock. But there were no more weapons capable of defending men against really dangerous creatures than a man will take on a camping-trip in a national park on Earth. And the Expedition could not communicate with other humans for at least six months. They were hundreds of light-years from help.

Brett said slowly, "On the ship, just before we landed, I heard that the radar-beacon on the ground here wasn't working. I think, sir, we'd better go over to the firing-plaza and find out the worst."

THEY went over to the firing-plaza. There had been a beacon there, left to notify Earth-ships where the first exploring-ship had landed. It would also notify any other intelligent race which dealt in such things as radar. There were a dozen men who went uneasily to see if anything had happened to make their landing unfortunate. They were defenseless, and more isolated from their kind than any humans had ever been before.

There was no sound anywhere save the wind in the trees. No bird-song. No insect-hum. Nothing but the ominous dull booming of the gigantic surf to the west. The ship that had brought them was long since in overdrive and unreachable by any means until it came back to normal space again.

They found where the beacon had been. It was gone. It had been a complex mechanism, powered by a pinch of atomic-pile residue. It should have sent out its signal, on a standard frequency, for years to come. It had been mounted on a solid concrete pillar, according to custom.

The concrete pillar was there, but the radar-beacon was not. It had been cut from its anchorage with something like a torch which cut the metal smoothly. There was as yet no oxidation on the severed surfaces.

The first-landing plaque had been removed from the same column. It was the plaque which recited that the exploring-ship *Franklin* had made a first-landing on this planet on such and such a day and year, Earth Calendar. Close by the column there was a rocket-blast crater in the ground, a small one, perhaps six or seven feet across. It was fresh. A rocket had landed here and removed the man-made objects after studying a human refuse-pit. Within days. Certainly within weeks.

It had left something of its own behind, though. There was a metal tripod set up on the ground. It was about man-high, with a box at its top shaped like an inverted cone. There were round holes on four sides of the box. It was not placed on any foundation, simply set up on the ground for some temporary purpose. And left behind.

Kent moved to approach it.

"Hold on!" said Brett, very pale. "That could be a thing to collect specimens!"

Kent stopped. Halliday, the Expedition head, turned his face to Brett.

"Specimens?"

"Us," said Brett harshly. "We set

traps to collect specimens for study, when we're making an ecology-study of a planet! It would be logical for something intelligent to want to see specimens of the creatures that make garbage-pits and radar-beacons and landing plaques!"

There was a long pause. Then Halliday said in a flat voice:

"Yes. There are eyes in the thing, too. Or lenses. It could be a collection-trap. Or it could be transmitting pictures of us elsewhere, on a frequency our ship wasn't set to detect. Let's go back to the camp and think it over."

He moved to go back, and the others with him. The alien tripod glittered in the peculiar dead-white light which did not come from the sun. Brett started to follow the others. His foot caught in something as he moved away from the tripod. His heart jumped into his throat. It could be a trip-wire. . . .

But it wasn't. It was a tiny golden chain, very humanlike in manufacture. It had broken. Brett picked it up very cautiously. A locket slipped off. He picked that up, too. It had the feel of a human artifact. It was. It had been made by hand.

There was a picture of a girl in it, under a protecting sheet of plastic. She was a human female, though her costume was like none that Brett had ever seen or heard of.

The picture was black-and-white—an ancient process—but it was unfaded, which meant that it had been made recently.

This, of course, was starkly impossible. One does not find a picture of a human girl in the ruins of an eight-thousand-year old culture, on a planet hundreds of lightyears from Earth. Not a picture in an antiquated medium, long forgotten, and with a background neither of this planet nor of Earth's. It was so completely impossible that Brett knew he wouldn't dare show it to any of his companions.

They wouldn't believe it wasn't a "plant" or a fake.

II

The Elektran solar system displays certain anomalies, not only in the existence of a satellite-sun Rubra, no larger than a gas-giant planet. . . . (but in) the twin worlds Thalassia and Aspasia, each nearly seven thousand miles in diameter, which revolve about each other at a distance of only 250,000 miles. Tidal strains have long since ended their diurnal rotation and they turn the same faces toward each other during their period of revolution of not quite 25 days. This nearness and the development of intelligent races on both planets led to the development of interplanetary communication between them some time between 7,000 and 11,000 years ago. The tragic results of this communication—*Astrographic Bureau Publication 11297, Supplement to Space Pilot Vol. 460, Sector XXXIV. p. 56.*

ATRENCING-MACHINE with its buckets removed, went toiling painfully up to the alien tripod some six hours later. It was under remote control. It skirted the elongated opening of a concrete tunnel, made by the long-dead, six-fingered race of which the exploration-ship had found skeleton remains. There were thirty or more of those tunnels, which of course no member of the Expedition had yet entered. But the *Franklin's* report said that the tunnels had been launching tubes for giant rockets. The rockets had gone roaring out over the ocean, rising steadily, until they swept round the curve of the planet to blast across space and loose destruction upon the sister-world Aspasia. The firing-plaza took its name from these tunnels. The refugee-settlement—shelters of lignin plastic—had evidently been the shelter in which the dying, despairing Thalassians lived while they took their revenge.

The trench-digger ground and rumbled and blundered on its way. Once a side-tread slipped and it stalled in a thicket of trees it could not push down. It backed out and went bumbling on toward the bright new metal of the tripod.

Back at the camp, the vision-screen which showed what the trenching-machine saw showed the firing-plaza as looking like an abandoned area of Earth, with long, slanting shadows and

sharp contrasts of light and dark.

The robot machine went on. It was taller than a man, and its outline from the front was not dissimilar. It approached the glistening three-legged object with the inverted cone on top. At the camp, the members of the Expedition watched the vision screen. Brett Carstairs felt acutely uncomfortable. He'd been suspicious because his training in ancient technical processes naturally made him suspect ancient psychological processes in all unfamiliar objects. But of course the tripod could be completely harmless and incapable of doing damage. . . .

It wasn't.

The trenching-machine drew nearer. Twenty yards. Ten. Five yards. Ten feet, and the round holes in the conical box looked more than ever like eyes. The trenching-machine bumped the tripod. It toppled over.

Back at the camp there was a flash of light and the members of the Expedition looked at a blistered, blackened, peeling screen. The sound of the detonation came seconds later, and it was like a fist in the chest. At the same instant the ground bucked violently. There was a light brighter than the sun.

There was simply no virtue in running away. Brett said numbly to himself, though he didn't hear the words as formed:

"Atomic explosion. We're dead, now."

He rose stiffly from his seat and left the hut. He looked toward the firing-plaza two miles away. There was a hill between, but he saw a gigantic smoke-ring spinning toward the sky. There was a horrible, incandescent, two-branched fountain in the air. Flame poured skyward, while Brett, deafened, hardly perceived the incredible roar.

Others came out of the hut. Belmont, the nuclear man of the Expedition, very absurdly carried something from his laboratory, at which he looked intently without raising his eyes to the sky. Hallday looked at the fountain of flame with an expression of embittered indig-

nation. Janney, the meteorologist, stared and stared and then ridiculously wet his finger and held it up, his air one of complete absorption.

ONE flame suddenly began to diminish. It failed rapidly in intensity. In seconds it had lessened to a mere glow to be seen over the hillcrest between. The other flame burned more and more luridly—and abruptly stopped. But the rising smoke-ring still hurtled upward, expanding as it rose. It was ten thousand feet up. Fifteen thousand. Janney watched it with his head thrown back and his wetted finger still absurdly held aloft. His lips moved, but Brett did not hear anything at all.

People did unreasonable things. Brett saw the Expedition's official flier-pilot solemnly take a cigarette from his pocket, tap it against the back of his hand, put it slowly in his mouth and puff on it. He very carefully blew a smoke-ring of his own, staring blankly where the fountains of flame had risen. There was steam rising there now.

Then Janney's voice came, very faintly, like a remembered sound rather than like an actual noise.

"There's a wind from the ocean," said Janney thinly. "It's blowing the atom-cloud inland. There's a wind from the ocean. It's blowing the atom-cloud inland. There's a wind from the ocean—"

He said it over and over, like an automaton. His voice grew stronger as Brett's hearing came back. And suddenly, it seemed, they were all released from the hypnosis of shock, and Belmont looked up from his radiation-counter and said in a sort of mild astonishment:

"Ten more seconds and we'd have known that!"

Then a babbling of voices. There was a crazy confusion all around. Voices cried. "We've got to move camp!" Voices asked imploringly, "Are we burnt? Are we burnt?" Halliday displayed unsuspected leadership and bellowed at them in a shaking voice and took matters in hand.

The first requisite was information. There was an even greater need for action. It is not healthy to camp within two miles of a recent atomic-explosion site. Wind blowing from it to one's camp will hardly be salubrious. Halliday crackled orders. While Brett helped loose one of the two fliers from its tie-down ropes, Halliday had other men dragging out emergency rations and canteens and the rolled-up inflatable shelters that could be used to live in. As he snapped instructions, Halliday interjected odd fragments of thought as if everything that came into his head also came out of his mouth.

The flier took off vertically and swept toward the ocean, on shouted last-minute instructions from Belmont to stay upwind. Halliday stopped his stream of feverish instructions as Brett came back from the take-off spot.

"Good work, Carstairs!" said Halliday. His thinning white hair blew erratically about his head. "Your suspicions made that tripod go off with us two miles away instead of right on top of it."

Brett moistened his lips. He'd had time to begin to feel shaky, now, but the churning-up of all his emotions somehow made his mind work feverishly. He said abruptly:

"That tripod didn't explode. There were three things going off. One atomic explosion and two fizz-offs. Where the bomb exploded, there couldn't have been anything left behind to make those flames!" Brett heard himself saying, "The firing-plaza was booby-trapped."

Halliday had opened his mouth to shout another order, but he stopped short.

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"There were three bombs," said Brett shakily, "and only one went off properly. The two fizz-offs—they didn't make critical mass fast enough. Their active material vaporized instead of detonating. At a guess, they were too old to work right."

"Too old—"



The girl shrank back in horror and screamed

Brett made a helpless gesture.

"I know it sounds crazy! But new bombs should blow! And there was a war on this planet once. The—people died. But they were getting even while they died. Wouldn't it be reasonable that they should set booby-traps to kill their enemies if any of them came here?"

The flier, circling two thousand feet up and to windward of the atom-column, came streaking down toward the Expedition's camp. Halliday opened his mouth, closed it, and came to a rational decision.

"That will have to be discussed later. You fly? Take the second flier and scout a camping-place not less than fifty miles up the coast. Pick a place that should

not have any artifacts about. Then come back. We'll shift camp to avoid possible radiation in case the wind changes. We don't know whether it will or not, but we have to be out of range in any case."

He made a pushing motion at Brett and turned back to the work at hand. Brett went to the second flier and loosened it.

He was aloft before the first flier had landed, and he headed north. An idea occurred to him, and he dropped lower. The planet Thalassia might be dead, but something other than men from Earth had been here very recently. Flying high would make him invisible to eyes on the ground, but would make him very visible indeed to detection-radar. If there

were intelligent creatures on *Thalassia* now, they would take precautions against unexpected encounters with alien creatures. Very probably the tripod had been a warning device left by the strange creatures who had owned the locket and chain. It would be wise to fly low.

BRETT flew slowly, slowly enough to estimate distance and examine the shoreline. It was incredible. There were places where highlands ended abruptly at the shore. At those places mountainous masses of spray and foam shot upward where the breakers struck. There was one place where the beach matched the human exploring-ship's first beach-touching. There was shining sand and boulders for a full mile inland. The breakers themselves rolled in like rows of skyscrapers and crashed with even more catastrophic sounds. On earth, in the South Pacific, winds could blow completely around the Antarctic continent and build up waves with seventy-foot crests. But *Thalassia* was all ocean save for the one continent and a few dependent, nearby islands. Trade winds blowing would have had a twenty-thousand-mile reach in which to make these waves. The gravity here, too, was a little less than on Earth. They should be monstrous.

So Brett Carstairs flew at five-hundred feet above the ground, a mile inshore from the breaker-line, and saw waves some three-hundred feet high roaring in toward him, and he saw them fling spume in masses higher than he flew. Sometimes he thought he saw living things in the water, but he was not sure. Once he did see a stranded sea-monster, frayed and tattered by corruption, but that was not his present business.

Just at the distance Halliday had named, he found a running stream winding down into the ocean, only to be lost in its surf. He followed it inland for some miles. He saw an adequate place of refuge for the Expedition. He

landed. He made sure. The river was fresh and ran a hundred yards wide between steep cliffs, yet there was some clear ground and at least one spot where giant trees almost met above the water. The Expedition would be undetectable from the air, under the shelter of an overhanging shelf. Its fliers could be hidden under the leafy screen. It would do.

It was on the way back that it occurred to Brett that the ship which would come to pick up the Expedition six months from now would not know where to look for them. And, it would be highly vulnerable to whatever had placed that metal tripod on the firing-plaza.

Then he thought to wonder what would happen if a ship landed on a firing-plaza, or in the ruins of a city. The exploring-ship had not spotted any cities undestroyed by bombs. But just suppose. . . .

HE LANDED with an extremely queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach. When he saw the pictures of the plaza as it looked now, he was even less comfortable. The entire group of ancient rocket-launching tunnels had been nearly two miles in extent. There was a half-mile crater where an atom bomb had gone off underground. It was a cleanly blasted hollow, lined with glass. It was nowhere near the spot where the tripod had been. There were two other incandescent holes, gaping wide and still pouring out clouds of steam. They were irregularly-shaped and twenty feet or more across. There had been other bombs underground at those places, too, but instead of blasting in the millionth of a second they had gone off slowly, disintegrating in seconds and vaporizing most of their own material before it could disintegrate. The critical mass hadn't been achieved quickly enough to blow them. It was exactly the kind of failure that could be expected of a brilliantly designed booby-trap that happened not to be sprung from

some thousands of years. The location of these bombs, also, had no relationship to the position of the tripod.

The blast had not been the tripod, but the bombs buried by the long-exterminated inhabitants of Thalassia, to destroy any creature landing on their world after its air was sweet and clean again.

Brett reported his choice of a new camping-place. He found his guesses about the booby-trapping of the plaza accepted as verified. They were. But Halliday said querulously:

"What the devil was the tripod?"

"It could have been a beacon," said Brett, "with variations. The exploring-ship set up a beacon to guide Earth-ships to its landing-place, so they wouldn't need to repeat all the work it had done. But suppose—well—people not from Earth wanted to find out if all the Thalassians were really dead? There was a beacon. Life had been around, recently. They might have dozens of those tripods at different places. Anything alive would go up to them and examine them. The eyes might modify the signal they sent. Anything intelligent and alive would be reported, either by a change in the tripod's signal, or by the fact that its signal stopped."

Brett had worked out the notion during his flight to the North and back. Halliday blinked. He turned and barked at somebody. Emergency equipment was being loaded into both fliers. He turned back to Brett:

"What set off the booby-trap?"

"The toppling of the tripod, most likely," suggested Brett. "It would be sending a tight beam straight up. When it fell over it would send that beam at the ground. High-frequency surges would be induced. They could set off an electronic trigger that was designed to blow the bombs when a ship landed nearby. The creatures who were wiped out might want to kill their enemies whenever they turned up, even after thousands of years."

Then Halliday said in a flat voice:

"But something did land! It took the human beacon, and set up the tripod; we saw the rocket-crater where it took off."

"It wasn't big," said Brett. "If the Thalassians were unpleasant enough, they might scheme so that a scout-ship could land and take off unharmed, but a passenger-liner bringing colonists would be wiped out."

Halliday nodded sourly.

"A nice thought! If you're right, then that tripod might have been set up by the creatures the Thalassians set their booby-traps for! And if Aspasians are beginning to explore this planet again, they'll take us for Thalassians—they'll try to murder us!"

Brett offered no ideas. He helped load his flier, conferred briefly with the pilot of the other, and they took off together. He led the way to the campsite he'd chosen. He left his load and two passengers. The other flier did the same. They went back. Fifty miles along the coast. They loaded up. They returned. They were back again. Nobody thought of relaxing. At the new campsite a biologist was at work on nearby fruits, and someone was fishing. Fish, too, would be tested for edibility. Brett flew and flew. One trip after another. The two fliers ferried supplies in quantity. Equipment was another matter. Once the route was established, the work grew tedious. Half an hour to load up. Ten minutes to fly fifty miles. Half an hour to unload.

BECAUSE there was no night, exhaustion came upon Brett before he realized it. He had no time to examine the golden locket in detail. . . .

The thought uppermost in his mind was that the Expedition had to survive. Brett wearily applied his mind to make that practical, but weariness hit him suddenly. He nearly flubbed a landing on the river, at last. Halliday snapped at him:

"We can't move everything, Carstairs, but it is urgent that we get all

possible supplies to this new site. You must be more careful!"

Brett said tiredly:

"It might be a good idea to leave behind as much as we can."

"What?" fumed Halliday. "Leave supplies we need?"

Brett yawned uncontrollably.

"Whoever or whatever left the tripod," he said wearily, "will probably go back when it—they—finds it's stopped reporting. There'll be a bomb-crater and the fizz-off holes. If we've left a lot of stuff—houses and all the rest—they may think we simply went to the firing-plaza to look at their tripod and didn't come back because the bomb blew. That might be pleasant."

Halliday fumed again.

"You irritate me," he said peevishly. "I should think of such things, not you! But it is sound thinking. Go get some rest!"

Brett got out of the flier. He stumbled up to the encampment under its shelf of stone. He heard the sound of chopping. There were cave-mouths here, but the caves were shallow. Somebody was hacking at the back wall of one of them. It was a wall, an artificial wall. After eight thousand years it was not a solid barrier, and it had been hastily constructed. It was Kent who was hacking at the tiers of stones.

"Looks like a sealed-up cave," he told Brett phlegmatically. "It could be anything, even a place where Thalassians tried to seal themselves in with air-renewal apparatus to last out the time the air was poisoned. It wouldn't work, of course. The air could've been deadly for five or fifty or five hundred years, depending on the amount of radioactivity. But if there's any size to this, it might make a good shelter for us, and we ought to find some stuff in it."

Brett nodded sleepily. He thought to look at his wrist-chronometer. It was some thirty-eight hours since the Expedition's landing. He'd worked steadily for all that length of time.

Kent's pick went through the wall.

Nothing in particular happened. Kent pulled rocks away. Crumbled mortar came with them. He enlarged the hole in a matter-of-fact fashion. Presently it was of a size to permit easy entrance. No particular smell emanated from it. The inside air was cooler. That was all. Kent went and got a hand-light. He cast its fierce glare inside. He nodded his head, put down the light and went away.

Brett picked up the light and threw it through the opening. He saw shining wet walls, and stalactites and stalagmites. There was an artificial curved ramp leading away somewhere between a pair of limestone cave-formations. There was a curious small heap on the artificially flattened floor. He focused the light on it.

Bones. They looked human. They were cemented to the floor by an eons-old layer of glistening, almost-transparent mineral.

Brett entered, blinking. The skeletons were well-enough preserved to be tragic, but he remembered that the ancient race had had six fingers and other not-quite-usual features. He looked. Yes. The interior of this place was squared and leveled. It had been worked into shape. There was a tunnel leading off to the left and he glanced in. A low-ceilinged room, crowded with objects in rows. Machines. More skeletons. "He stood rocking on his feet with weariness. He thought: *'Now we'll know something about a civilization that was wiped out while our ancestors were still hunting mammoths.'*" He should have been excited, but somehow he wasn't. Then he realized why.

THE objects so neatly arranged in rows were not machines. They had been, but they weren't any longer. They were heaps of rust. Swollen, nodular, distorted heaps of oxide of iron and copper and—yes—even aluminum. They were old! They were mineralized. But they had been mineralized after they had been destroyed.

He heard voices. Kent was bringing the rest of the Expedition inside. Lights flickered and flashed. He heard shoutings. Men crowded past the compartment he stared at, exclaimed exultantly, and went on. Voices echoed eerily. The mood of the Expedition was the excited rejoining of children with a newly discovered playground. But what they were exploring was a tomb. Here despairing six-fingered creatures had walled themselves in from the light and air of their own world to try to outlive its poisoning. They had expected perhaps a thousand years of entombment. But it was forever.

Brett was too tired for any emotional reaction. He found himself mumbling:

"They forgot that there's always some water in caves. Water makes them. And water seeping down would be radioactive. So they died."

He made his way back toward the opening Kent had made. He went to the outer cave, where there were sleeping-bags. Halliday met him. Halliday carried more hand-lights.

"Ah, Carstairs!" he said exuberantly. "You picked a lucky place! When I learned the firing-plaza had been booby-trapped I was really in despair! I thought any other site would be booby-trapped too. I thought we might be unable to work at all, but here we've got a bolt-hole they tried to make use of: Artifacts! Skeletons! We can get a marvelous picture of their civilization under stress! Marvelous!"

He bobbed into the hole in the wall and was gone.

Brett found a sleeping-bag and crawled into it. He went to sleep. It seemed to him that around him as he slept there were excited cries and much scurrying-about. The members of the Expedition were scientists come to examine a dead civilization. It had seemed that they would have nothing to examine and would soon be dead themselves. Now they had work to do, even in hiding. They rejoiced.

But some time during his slumber,

Brett dreamed. In his dream he saw the girl of the impossible hand-made locket. He did not know where it was, but she looked at him, and her eyes grew wide and horrified. She screamed, and figures came running from somewhere. At sight of Brett they howled with fury and drew strange weapons and came rushing to kill him.

III

On the hemisphere facing Aspasia, Thalasia's twin planet, there is but one rocky island not constantly swept by the ocean's giant swells. Evidences of former occupation exist here, but the island has been wave-swept by enormously violent storms, and only excavations for what may have been an observatory and military base remain.—*Astrographic Survey Publication 11297. Appendix to Space Pilot Vol. 460, Sector XXXIV. P. 71.*

THE contents of the cave were of interest to the biologist, the archaeologists, the camera specialist, the specimen-preservation member of the Expedition's staff, the paleontologist, the historian, to Halliday, Belmont, Janny and everyone else but Brett. It would have been of interest to him too, if it had happened that the cave was dry. But there was no single metal object not corroded out of all imaginable resemblance to its original form. The relatively few ceramic remains he could identify as having been made by injection-molding and fired within their molds. That meant a remarkably high state of civilization. But there was no object suitable for his examination as a technological object. The restoration specialist began the extremely tedious process of re-displacement on them. With suitable precautions, a heap of rust can electrolytically be restored to its original condition of solidity and form—if the rust has not been disturbed. But it is an excruciatingly slow affair.

Brett had no proper function in the cavern underground.

He helped set up a sky-scanner outside. It would detect a repulsor-field meaning a human ship maneuvering in

atmosphere. He helped set up an automatic signalling device to be triggered by the detection of such a field. It would instantly transmit to the Earthship a warning of danger and the need for caution, and then shut off. If any space vessel came into Thalassia's atmosphere using an Earth-type drive, this combination of instruments would warn both ship and Expedition. After due assurance that each was what it claimed to be, they could get together, the Expedition could re-embark, and everybody could get the hell away from Thalassia. Further action would then be taken by the Earth government. This was Halliday's decision, and it was reasonable enough.

But after this prosaic matter was settled, Brett fidgeted. The other members of the Expedition were happy. The cave had been a sealed-in life-lock, in which Thalassians had hoped to survive their planet's doom. They succeeded only in leaving innumerable objects and items informative to the Earth scientists. There were the skeletons of more than three hundred of the six-fingered, six-toed bipeds for study. Either their air-renewers had failed them, or radio-activity came down to the cave in the ground-water. But the cave was of great extent. It went deep into the hillside for more than half a mile, and many possible extensions had been sealed off, at that. All its new occupants, save Brett, exulted over the scientific material to be worked with. He brooded.

Generators came from the first campsite, powerlines ran into the cave, and the due examination of the ancient civilization of Thalassia began, though the investigators were in hiding even as they worked. Other city-sites or possible unbombed settlements would have been ruled out anyhow, now, with knowledge of the Thalassian tendency toward boobytraps. But this site seemed safe enough. The creatures who occupied this expected to live, unlike those at the firing plaza. But as a general thing, Thalassian sites would have to be regarded with suspicion. The ancient

dead had made no distinction in their enmity for the enemies who had destroyed them, and possible innocent explorers, like man.

THE happy labor of the Expedition went on and Brett, brooding unhappily over the locket, explored the cave again. Naturally. He checked the re-displacement boxes, set up around the artifacts he could tell something about in the course of several months of restoration. He looked at the skeletons. Halliday was zestfully at work on a modeled restoration of a Thalassian as he looked in life, based on the measurements of a skull. As Halliday modeled it, the Thalassian looked remarkably human.

"But," said Brett, "aren't you inclined to model the creature rather too much in our own image?"

Halliday was the Expedition's sculptor as well as its head. He frowned.

"You are very annoying, Carstairs!" he said dourly. "They were humanoid. Save for a rather prognathous jaw and this difference—here—in the occiput, this could be a human skull! Oh, the sutures are different, too, but—"

Then he fumed.

"You have made me realiz that there is no reason for my having assumed a human ear-shape," he snapped. "You irritate me! Go somewhere! Do something! You disagree with me too often, and too often I suspect that you are right! Contrive some project of your own, and let me make my own mistakes!"

Brett said slowly, because he had thought something out very carefully but still wasn't confident of his reasoning:

"I'd like to take a look at Aspasia. . . . Not by rocket," he added painstakingly. "That would be looking for trouble! But the pilot book says there's one island on the other hemisphere. I'd like to see if there's another tripod set up on that. If I could record its signal where nobody's been near it, we might be able

to forge it for the firing plaza site. Simply to avoid attracting—ah—unfavorable attention.”

“I authorize that,” Halliday said, “but I make one stipulation. You will arrange to detect radar on your flier, and if a radar does play on you, you will make sure you do not lead any—ah—creatures back here to us.”

Brett agreed, wryly. He was a little bit relieved. But he asked:

“Are you worried, too, that whoever took the beacon at the firing plaza might want to take a human spaceship to examine in the same way? To study it and perhaps duplicate it in quantity?”

Halliday sputtered.

“Of course I’m worried!” he said angrily. “If I could prevent a ship from coming here to pick us up I would—and remain here for always! It would be my duty! If there is an intelligent race which does not know of humanity’s existence, we do not want it to learn from a shattered spaceship! We would not want them to know about our interstellar drive! Certainly not unless humanity was aware that they had learned! But you, Carstairs, annoy me by thinking of the things that would keep me awake nights—if there were such things as nights, here!”

Brett nodded thoughtfully. Something had to be done to find out the actual extent of the danger. Brett had ideas of less than total fatality, but he needed to make sure.

HE TOOK three twenty-four-hour periods to get ready for the journey he was to make. The flier, of course, could stay aloft almost indefinitely. With the slightly lesser gravity of Thalassia, it could carry a heavier load, too.

He made one low-level flight back to the original camp. The geiger-counter reading of radiation was a bare two points above normal for this world. He got some special equipment—taking care to leave the camp looking as if its owners had simply walked over to the

firing-plaza and had not come back—and worked. Next he consulted Janney about probable meteorological conditions.

Then he took off and flew a thousand miles along the coastline in what would be the radar-shadow of the seacoast waves. After that he struck out across the ocean. The flier was a standard Earth-type utility job, capable of speeds up to six-hundred miles an hour, but cruising under three-hundred. For work on the continent of Chios, Brett would not have worried about fuel. But according to the exploration-ship report, he had a long, long journey before him.

He flew and flew and flew. It was very tedious, and it did not help that he was staking his life on a guess he was by no means sure about. He watched the flier on automatic control for four hours running. It did not change course by the fraction of a degree, nor change altitude by as much as fifty feet. In the end he went uneasily to sleep.

When he woke, the look of things had changed. The ocean had been deep, deep blue and the light came only from that speckled brightness in the sky which was the heart of the Canis Venitici star-cluster. Now those stars had been left below the horizon behind him, though there were still other speckles in the heavens. Rising, however, there was Elektra. It seemed exactly the size of Sol as seen from Earth, and its brightness was diminished just enough so he could bear to look at it directly. Warmth came from it. It was markedly yellower than Brett’s home sun. And the ocean below him had become an astonishing hue which was still blue, but verged upon purple.

These, though, were items he noticed later.

He saw Aspasia, already above the horizon.

It was monstrous in size. It was nearly four times the diameter of the Moon as seen from Earth, and it filled sixteen times as much of the sky. It covered

a larger space than Brett's fist held before him. It was the size of a ship's vision-port looked at five feet away. It seemed to crowd the heavens. It seemed plunging terribly toward Thalassia. It was like a gigantic missile falling. It was ominous . . . menacing . . . grim and terrifying and horrible to look at, hanging so close and seeming always about to crush the plane above which Brett's small flier flew.

He stared at it for a long time before he could be quite reasonable about it. If he'd watched it rising as the flier made its way around Thalassia's curve—gigantic even then, filling a quarter of a quadrant of the world's edge—its present appearance might have been less of a shock. But he had slept until it was a fourth of the way up toward the zenith.

He saw it as sandy-colored, with mottled patches which he knew were deserts and precipitous mountain ranges. There were tiny blue pittings here and there—many of them. They would be the enormous blue-glass lakes the exploring-ship had sighted. These were believed to be the sites of former cities, melted to glassy liquid by fusion-bombs from Thalassia in the long-ago atomic war. They were solidified now, and blue. Brett saw some areas which might be merely semi-arid plains. And there was a few noticeable veinings which had olive-colored borders. They were Aspasias' few and narrow seas. They were mere channels.

SEEN with the naked eye, Thalassia's sere and battered sister-planet seemed very suitably named. It looked as the courtesan Aspasias might have looked when old and with all her beauty gone: made grotesque by the bedizenings which once would have seemed so charming.

Brett Carstairs stared up at the world whose inhabitants had wiped out the race native to this and had in turn—so it appeared—been exterminated by the dying Thalassians as their cities became

charnel-houses and their continent a tomb.

As he stared, something said "*Beep!*" in the flier's cabin. He jumped, and stared at the dial of his recently-contrived radar-detector. The needle flickered wildly, but settled nowhere at all. That single startled chirp had been a radar-impulse touching the flier. Things did not look good.

The flier went on and on over the wine-purple sea. Brett scanned the ocean. A monstrous swell, far away, broke in a smother of white foam. Some sub-sea mountain almost reached the surface. The giant ocean waves broke upon it, as they do on shallows and on fishing-banks on Earth. Here there was half a square mile of white.

The white was assurance that the flier was on course, but the radar-chirp was even more important. It was ominous because it was solitary, though only a palaeotechnologist would have realized it. Radar is an ancient device, of course. Modern radar brings back to a spaceship an astonishing amount of detailed information. To Brett's knowledge, not since the last war on Earth had any radar shut itself off when it contacted an object. Then it was a spotting device which did not betray its position to the object it spotted.

Brett felt those unhappy cold prickles which are the signs of danger realized. Any rational man feels them. Only, a resolute man grows angry and becomes reckless because he is ashamed of being apprehensive.

Brett did.

He scowled and placed a reproduction of an ancient weapon handy. He had not the materials for a modern blaster, of course. But he'd gone back to the first camp and taken a drum of rocket-fuel, and labored at the improvisation of an antique open-breech gun. He'd made plastic shells for it. The heavy rocket-fuel would give mass to the missiles. He'd made what used to be called a bazooka. He drove the flier on.

The tip of an island rose above the

horizon. It rose and grew with an excruciating slowness. It was a group of rocky needles rising from the sea. It was the one island in a hemisphere of ocean. The outer needles of rock were monstrous monoliths against which the giant sea-swells crashed. There were single columns, hundreds of yards thick and hundreds of yards high, about and over which the spume flew wildly. There were surging maelstroms among those outer rocks. Wild swirlings, incredible violence, unpredictable floods raged in the channels between them. Had this been on Earth—but there were no such violent waves on Earth—the air about the island would have been a cloud of sea-birds. But no life showed here. Naturally!

The island appeared very close, and Brett's head jerked as he heard a snapping sound. There was a hole in the flier's cabin above his head. There were streaks of white vapor shooting on before him. There were more snappings, unspeakably venomous.

His hands broke the paralysis of shock. He dived. And as he plunged toward the monstrous swells he thought fleetingly of how unlike this was to his dreams of what the Expedition would be like. He'd hoped for a thrilling feeling of limitless isolation. Instead, he was in the midst of an aerial dog-fight.

He craned his neck to see up and behind. He saw a thing plunging from the air above. A rocket—a small one. Its blast would be just about right to have made the small crater beside the now demolished tripod where Firing Plaza One had been.

There were flickering sparks as it dived furiously after him. Streaks of vapor shot toward him with amazing speed, and he felt the blank astonishment of somebody sent backward in time. He'd been almost ashamed to make so primitive a weapon as a bazooka. But the rocket was shooting a machine-gun at him, with tracer-bullets to help in marksmanship.

Brett made his dive steeper. The

rocket pulled out, feeling sure he was headed for a crash. It circled vengefully overhead. Its wings were small. It could not fly except at high speed.

Brett landed. The splashing was satisfyingly violent, but it was actually a splendid landing in the very trough between two monstrous seas a hundred yards tall. It seemed that he had wrecked his flier in a moving, glassy-walled canyon of surging solidity. To the rocket, it should seem a certainty.

Brett waited to see what the rocket would do.

It circled and circled and circled. It needed information about creatures like Brett. If there was any craft that could land and salvage Brett's flier, they should risk anything to learn something of his race and kind.

But nothing happened. The rocket dived back toward the island. It sank low and vanished. . . .

BRETT waited. His mouth was dry as he made fresh plans. He had been detected bumbling steadily across the ocean at a stodgy three-hundred miles an hour. He had made no maneuvers of evasion when the rocket dived on him from overhead, and the whole impression was of something which could not maneuver, in charge of someone without skill. If they could come after him they wouldn't expect resourcefulness. He could take off at will, and straight up. He could streak at twice the speed they knew of along between the rolling swells. He could fly like a gull between the wave-crests, unreachable by missile-weapons and probably even more modern ones. He had a good chance to get away if only the occupants of the island did not have many small fliers capable of hunting him at higher speed and with greater agility than he could summon.

Floating with seeming sogginess on the water, the flier rose and rose and rose. It reached a wave-crest, and Brett saw the island again. It loomed high, now. He saw large sentinel-columns

of stone nearer than the island's main mass. He saw the purplish seas go surging in between those columns, tilting up and foaming terribly about them, but with a tumult of water in the center remaining unbroken until farther on.

The wave-crest passed, and the flier descended into the trough again. There was an enormously long wait before he was lifted up once more. He took a bearing then.

Again in the trough he used the flier's drive to move him so his craft would be in a position to be tossed chiplike between the monstrous obstacles. When the island was hidden again, he used the drive a second time . . . a third.

When the topmost peak of the island remained in sight between the waves' troughs, Brett let the flier drift aimlessly. It was carried toward the island by the swells and by the wind. He heard the roaring of the surf—such surf as only remote islands near Antarctica experience back at home. The booming became thunderous. It became intolerable. It became a cannonade of sound that human ears could not endure. And therefore it dulled because of its deafening volume.

The rocky sentinels loomed high. They were a little less than a mile apart, but the surf and acres of foam about their bases made the gap seem narrow indeed. The flier bobbed like a bit of flotsam on waves as high as skyscrapers and whose troughs were deep as minor canyons. Above him rose stratified rocky pillars, dripping floods of seawater, surrounded by maelstroms.

The flier went through between them. On beyond there were sheer cliffs against which the seas broke in frightful, explosive impacts.

A current behind the northern column swung the flier about. Brett was, for a moment, in the lee of that vast buttress. The swells lessened. There was a vast, slow-moving eddy here. There was what could have been called a harbor, save that no imaginable ship could shelter in it. The flier, whirling slowly

as it drifted, moved toward a more sheltered spot. Brett watched. There were creatures here, and they would want to know what queer sort of being disputed the possession of *Thalassia* with them. . . .

HE SAW a movement among the rocks. Specks stirred, climbing swiftly down toward him. They seemed to slide down fastened cords from one shelf of stone to another. They were coming to try to keep the flier from shattering before they could examine it.

Brett got his primitive weapon ready. The efforts of the creatures would naturally be improvisations. Nobody would normally use the sea on *Thalassia*! So nobody would have anticipated a salvage operation such as these creatures meant to attempt.

An outward-jutting mass of stone formed a roof above the water where the flier drifted for a space, and the climbing creatures were out of sight. Brett could not make out what they were, but he reminded himself that like Halliday he had a tendency to see everything from an anthropocentric point of view. He tended to interpret moving creatures with human beings and Earth-animals as references.

The current was very slow, here. The surgings of the water were less. The flier floated under an overhang so close that Brett feared it would be crushed. But then he came out. There was flat stone ahead, wave-washed by trivial swells. The figures he had seen were almost at it. One did reach it and ran frantically in knee-deep water to try to see clearly inside the flier and observe its pilot.

Brett caught his breath. He did not believe it as he stared into the face of a girl to all appearances human. She wore close-fitting garments of what looked like yellow silk, with brief drappings that scarcely concealed the humanness of her form.

She looked at him and her eyes widened with purest horror. Her expres-

sion was that of one who regards a frightful monster. She screamed—though Brett's still-numbed ears heard it as a thin, high-pitched cry—and she thrust back from the flier she had seemed so anxious to reach. Other figures, also human in appearance, came running as they dropped down cords from the cliff.

At sight of Brett they howled with fury. They plunged toward him, dragging out strange weapons with which to destroy him.

Brett shot up from the heaving water at full acceleration, emergency lift, reckless of the fuel cost and with his face dead-white and dazed.

He had a picture of that girl in his pocket. . . .

IV

The arid and utterly monotonous desolation of Aspasia seems to negate at once any idea of surviving inhabitants, though the possibility cannot be entirely ruled out. The *Franklin* cruised over all probable areas without making contact with intelligent life-forms. Yet civilization did exist here. Highways still in good repair exist. It seems likely, however, that its former culture was developed in oases in its deserts, in concentrated population-centers. The previously mentioned lakes of blue glass may be considered to cover the sites of such oases, melted down by fusion-bombs from Thalassia. . . .

After this disaster it would be expected that any survivors would live only in caves or other inconspicuous places, and would hand down legends of destruction coming from the sky. The *Franklin*, indeed, could have been hidden from. . . .—*Astrographic Bureau Publication 11297, Appendix to Space Pilot Vol. 460, Sector XXXIV, p. 61.*

BRETT descended from a rainstorm to the small river before the camp-cave. He'd been in the cloudbank for a period that had no particular meaning because there was never any real night on Thalassia, and he descended in a downpour that was like the heavens opening, except that he'd been up where it started.

He got the flier under the overhanging trees a mile downstream from the cave, lifted it to the river-bank, tied it securely and walked through the more-

than-tropical downpour to where the camp had been set up.

Kent peered at him phlegmatically over a barricade of stones. He put away a heat-gun.

"Oh," he said calmly. "It's you. Halliday was talking about you yesterday."

Brett rummaged for dry clothing. He towed and shifted to other garments. He asked over his shoulder:

"Everything all right?"

"This cave was booby-trapped too," said Kent. "We should have been blown to hell when I broke down that stone wall." He paused and added. "We weren't."

"Odd," said Brett, with irony. "Halliday's in the cave?"

He was. Brett went in through the opening Kent had made. The interior was brightly lighted now. It was illuminated as effectively and as thoroughly as a museum on Earth. Cables ran along the passageways. Just inside the first entrance generators hummed. It was remarkable how the members of the Expedition had made a researcher's dream of this cave-site. All archaeologists have dreamed of finding an ancient city intact and of making their camp among the objects of their study. All have had wistful fantasies of laboratory facilities at the very spots where their study-material exists.

Here there was exactly that atmosphere. The doubtless irregular original cave-system had been worked over by the Thalassians who tried to make it a refuge for the ages. The walls and ceilings were sound. The passageways were neatly chiseled. The larger chambers were cleared of lime-formations and the walls made smooth. The debris from such workings had been used for fills. It was startling to find a perfect small city underground. Hundreds of human beings could have lived here. There were open spaces hundreds of feet across. There were halls with sixty-foot ceilings. There were even small cubicles as if for families. With bright lights and ample space and the remains of ancient

occupation right at hand, this was close to an archaeologist's dream of paradise.

But without any inconsistency at all, it was also a charnel-house. The air was sweet and clean, now, but manlike creatures had died by hundreds when the radioactive poison reached them even here. Seeping, lime-burdened water oozed everywhere. The smooth flat floors were covered by a glistening incrustation with minor ripples frozen upon it. The walls reflected light like glass. And nothing that had been part of the civilization of Thalassia remained intact. There were mounds on the floors, now covered with the glassy calcium-carbonate coating, or completely impregnated with it. Sometimes brightly-glazed bones appeared among these mounds. Sometimes there were the brightly-colored, rusted tints of metal objects long since vanished. Sometimes there was no clue at all to what the vanished objects had been.

HALLIDAY was seated by a desk which once had been packing-cases. He had half a dozen ceramic objects on the desk, used as paper-weights against air-currents which did not exist underground. He was writing exuberantly when Brett came in.

Halliday beamed.

"Ah, Carstairs!" he said happily. "You are our lucky member! We do our work under absolutely perfect conditions—and it is your doing, even if it was an accident. There are accident-prone individuals, and they are Jonahs on an expedition like this. But you are a favorable-coincidence-prone! I congratulate you!"

Brett sat down on a box which served well enough as a seat.

"I hear this cave was booby-trapped too."

"Yes," agreed Halliday blandly. "We smelled smoke. It was disturbing. We traced it, and there was a bomb made ready to bring down the cave about our ears. But the chemical explosive intended to bring the priming-bomb slugs

to critical mass had deteriorated. Unstable compounds, you know. It merely smouldered, instead of blowing us up. The Thalassians were not a forgiving type! They meant that if they couldn't live on this planet, nobody else should!"

Brett said grimly:

"The Aspasians aren't a forgiving type either. I think it's certain they are Aspasians. I found a base on the other side of the world. It would be logical for them to make a base there. Nobody else would."

Halliday's eyebrows almost met in the center of his forehead. "No! What are they like?"

"Technology about late twentieth-century, apparently," said Brett. "But I'm not sure. They've rockets, chemical explosives, missile weapons, synthetic fabrics and know electronics fairly well. They have good radars. Their females have high social standing, a love of adventure and take risks like the men."

"Evidently the base was not occupied," said Halliday briskly. "In any case, we have our work—and plenty to work with! This was really an incredible find, Carstairs! I've completed the restoration of a skull, by the way, to the way the Thalassians must have looked in life. I'll show you."

He swung about to a shelf behind him and lifted down what appeared to be a portrait bust. He put it proudly on his desk.

"They had six fingers," he observed zestfully, "and were quite stocky of build. But they were bipeds, a little shorter than we are, they wore clothing. . . ."

Brett looked. He said wryly:

"You've made the ears pointed. They were like ours. And prognathous jaw or no prognathous jaw, we'd pass for them."

"How do you know?" demanded Halliday.

"An Aspasian girl saw me," said Brett unhappily. "And she screamed."

He carefully related the affair of the island. Halliday protested:

"But the exploring-ship saw no sign of life on Aspasia!"

"Maybe they hid," said Brett tiredly. "Maybe they thought the *Franklin* was a Thalassian ship, built by some who'd managed to live through, as they did. Perhaps for that very reason they came over to Thalassia to fight it out here, to end the danger to their race forever. It looks like that. I thought they'd be even more anxious to track me home than to kill me, so I found a storm-cloud and stayed in it till it came ashore, and I came down to camp here with the rain."

Halliday winced. But then he said hopefully:

"Very wise! But we're well hidden, and this is a large world. We've not much to fear from creatures with no more than a twentieth-century technology."

"Unless," said Brett, "they've got twentieth-century desperation as well. I suspect they are desperate and ready to fight to the last among them to kill every one of us. They'll hunt us as we'd hunt the devil—which is what they think we are!"

THERE was a shouting at the entrance to the cave. It was Kent's voice. Among the echoes, the words were indistinct, but Brett thought he might have called something about a rocket. He shouted again. Halliday got up and walked briskly toward the sound.

The floor of the cave bounced violently. The lights went out. There was a crash like the end of the world, which lasted for a long half-minute. In the cave, things fell. Walls cracked. Sections of roof plunged down with thunderous impacts.

Then Kent's voice in the abysmal blackness.

"I heard a rocket-blast in the rain. I yelled. Then the bomb went off." His voice, usually toneless, quavered a little. Then he got it under control. "It was downstream, about where we keep the fliers, around the curve in the river-

Truth Will Out!

ENOUGH of this modesty, this hiding our lights under bushels.

We know of no other whiskey so good as Custom Distilled Lord Calvert, so pleasing to so many palates. There, we've said it.

But still it would be nice to know what *you* think of Lord Calvert, the whiskey that costs a little more, tastes a little better. Perhaps you'll try it this evening?

Calvert Dist. Corp., N.Y.C. Lord Calvert. Blended Whiskey. 86.8 Proof. 65% Grain Neutral Spirits.

bank. Lucky there is high ground between. But I saw the light. Atom bomb." Then he added calmly, "The shelf of rock fell down. We're buried in here."

Halliday rose to the emergency in his own manner.

"Somebody bring hand-lights and a counter," he snapped. "See if anyone's hurt!" Then he said irritably, "If they're Aspasians—they used cobalt bombs once. I hope they haven't used one now!"

But they had. Handlights came from the place where the supplies were piled. The spreading shelf outside the camp, which had sheltered the cave-entrance like a remarkably deep portico, had cracked from the ground-shock and its outer edge tilted down into the water of the river. There was a rill which ran underneath it from its upper edge, and ran out again down below. A geiger counter showed radioactivity. Not much yet, but some screens between the coun-

ter and the water identified the radioactive material. Cobalt-60.

Halliday's voice cracked with exasperation. A cobalt-based bomb had been dropped within a mile of the cave-entrance. Obviously, Brett's idea of hiding in a storm-cloud hadn't been good enough. When he landed, a bomb dropped. It indicated much better than twentieth-century technique. It even looked as if it hadn't been intended to shoot him down when he approached the island, but only to scare him back to his base. Yes, they'd been pleased when he got away. This was the result.

"We seal up the cave-entrance," snapped Halliday angrily. "We can't go outside. But there is air here which will not be immediately contaminated. We will think it over."

Brett helped shovel wet earth to fill the solitary entrance to the cavern with an airtight plug. He raged to himself at the disaster he'd brought on the expedition. He'd been sure that he'd evaded all possible trailing. There had been no radar! Could they have trailed him with infra-red? That was late twentieth century, too. There was no way to shake that sort of trailing. . . .

The Expedition was doomed. Much worse, in six months a ship would come from Earth for its members. That ship would not expect attack. It would be an easy target for the Aspasians. They'd smash the Earth-ship, study it, and make a fleet of interstellar ships themselves. Having fought one interplanetary war, they would never risk war against a warned adversary. They'd strike at Earth with absolute ruthlessness and ferocity. . . .

WHEN there was a completely adequate seal filling the cave-entrance, Brett reflected with a sort of sickish cynicism that history assuredly repeated itself upon Thalassia. Eight thousand years ago, humanoid creatures had sealed themselves in this same cavern, hopelessly hoping to secure life for their descendents. They'd failed, and now a

dozen humans had sealed themselves in, making the same foredoomed gesture.

He leaned against a passage-wall. That girl would rejoice fiercely if she knew.

Outside this sealed cave the rain poured down, washing the deadly radioactives of this last bomb down into the earth itself. Already, to take two breaths above-ground was to die. But presently deadly ground-water would come down to this ancient shelter and this cave would again become a lethal chamber.

After a little, Brett went heavily to the futile conference Halliday was holding. The cave-lights were still out, and only hand-lights illuminated the scene. Halliday gesticulated, his thinning white hair stirring as he moved.

"Where's your floor-plan, Morton?" he cried angrily. "The floor-plan of the entire cavern! You should have brought it! This is irritating enough, without members of the Expedition acting like helpless schoolgirls! Go get it! Janney! What is the weather outside?" He raised his hand peevishly. "I know it is raining! What is the wind-direction and speed?"

Janney said heavily:

"The wind's onshore, naturally! I told you yesterday that a tradewind blows! Of course in a rainstorm it loses force. It probably blows fifteen miles an hour, with gusts up to thirty or more."

Halliday clapped his hands sharply:

"Understand, everyone! We cannot stay here. We cannot go out of the ordinary exit. We have to find a new exit, or make one. I believe the rock-strata slant down toward the coast. Am I right, Simpson? Yes! It is probable that some of the sealed-off branches of this cave-system may reach the surface—or near it—upwind of the bomb-crafter! They would have been sealed off because they communicated with the air. The seals are to be broken and radioactivity checked in the air coming in. . . ."

Kent's voice, phlegmatic as always:

"Make up packs to carry?"

"Naturally!" snapped Halliday. "This is a most irritating occurrence! We had a perfect site for examination with all conveniences! Now it must be abandoned and it will not be possible to examine it again for years! Everyone should carry his written notes, but artifacts will have to be left behind for food. It is infuriating!"

He fumed, but Brett found himself admiring Halliday.

THE dark and echoing caverns resounded to strange noises, after that. The strangeness was largely due to the blackness which is not normal anywhere on Thalassia. Men examined carefully-drawn maps, and found sealing-off walls which blocked extensions of the cave-system. All limestone caverns are somewhat similar. One passage might have been blocked off because of a pothole leading to the surface, another because of an underground stream which would bring radioactivity in its waters. The Geiger counters gave grim news as one after another of the seals were broken.

There had probably been only one rocket at a time trailing Brett's flier, from so great an altitude that he could not detect it. A rocket has not an indefinite flying life. There must have been a relay system to keep on Brett's track. But there'd been a cobalt-cased bomb handy to drop when he went to ground. It would normally have made a continuous lethal fall-out over a strip of ground many miles long. In a rainstorm like this, the fall-out should be shorter, but vastly more intense.

It was. Air coming in the pierced walls that closed off unknown winding passages showed an intensity of radiation that made Belmont whistle softly.

"Right now," he told Brett, "the air outside is just about as breathable as so much straight chlorine. It wouldn't be as painful to the lungs, but the results would be the same."

Brett helped close up another small

opening with mud. Twelve men, from Earth and hundreds of lightyears from home, sealed in a cave that had been a tomb for eight thousand years. Unknown stars made speckles of light in the thin blue sky above the rain-clouds, at one place a nearby star-cluster made a mottled illumination brighter than the local sun. They were on a planet of water with but a single continent, and that was empty of moving life. There was life only in that hopeless cavern underground, and high in the air overhead, hovering until more hovering things should come to drop more death.

Beyond the atmosphere there was nothing at all. From a sufficient distance the globe which was Thalassia could be seen to be distorted, bulging noticeably toward its similarly deformed twin-world Aspasia, only a quarter-million miles away. They revolved about each other in implacable enmity, turning always the same faces toward each other.

A long, long way away there was the yellow sun Elektra, spinning in space, less bright than Sol but nearly as large. Nearer, and rolling sullenly about its primary was the red-dwarf satellite-star Rubra. The twin worlds followed it perpetually in its orbit in the Trojan position. From space the dark carbon-clouds could be seen upon its surface, forming in perpetual storms through which the fiery red of hell-flame could be seen. Further out were more planets, Lucifer and Titan and Argos, giant gas-worlds where life had never been. And spinning brilliantly in the glare of Elektra, close in toward it, blazed the little planet Melissa on its erratically inclined orbit, circling Elektra in a year of less than a dozen weeks.

But there was not quite a sameness and a staleness in all the happenings of empty space. Where the twin planets spun about each other there was motion. It was tiny by comparison with the vastness all about. But from the seared and sandy surface of Aspasia small white threads appeared. They stretched toward Thalassia across the gulf. There

were many of those threads. They were rocket-trails.

The enmity between the planets was not ended. A war-fleet roared toward the world that robot-rockets had killed before. Life had been found on it again. That life must be destroyed.

The strange, incurious stars watched all these things without emotion.

V

On Thalassia plants no longer seek to attract insects by bright colors or scent or nectar, because there are no insects. Plants which depended upon insects for fertilization have become extinct. Berry-bearing and fruit-bearing trees no longer compete for the carrying of their seeds by offering fragrance or taste. There are no birds. Even species which formerly found it advantageous to grow thorns for the discouragement of herbivorous animals no longer find the practice serviceable. . . . The flowers have lost their scent and the fruit its savor and even the thorns their sharpness, because there are no animals to take notice. . . .—*Astrographic Bureau Publication 11297, Appendix to Space Pilot Vol. 460, Sector XXXIV, p. 75.*

THE sound of the surf gave them hope—that and the Geiger counter readings. They climbed and crawled and wormed their way through channels and around glistening-wet bulges of stone. They had ropes around their waists like mountain-climbers, so that no one would fall alone into the sometimes gaping depths they encountered.

Once Brett, in the lead, crawled upon his belly for more than a hundred feet with rock touching his back all the way. He could not have done it but for the assurance of the rope that he could be pulled back. Once they had to use a small charge of explosive to break down a mass of calcite which barred the way. They spent hours in the journey. But they went on because to stop or turn backward was to die. And for the last half-hour they did have the encouragement of the thunderous sound of surf.

Then they came out quite undramatically from a hole with many brushwood sticks in it, in the space between the

roots of a giant tree. They heard the surf clearly, then. They had crawled more than five miles underground, and they were almost at the edge of the beach when they reached the open air.

The jungle which here crowded the beach line was saturated, but the rain had stopped. They moved in the direction that by convention was called south. A magnetic compass pointed somewhere, and steadily, but it bore no relationship to any astronomical phenomenon and they could not take it seriously. When they moved south, they moved along the shoreline toward their first camp and the shattered Firing Plaza Number One. It was not an especially sensible direction to choose, but they happened to have come out on that side of the river which ran before their late cavern. They needed to get away from there. It was doubtful whether it would be wise to wade a stream that ran through cobalt-contaminated ground.

"If I read our enemies right, now," said Brett grimly to Halliday, "after underestimating them before, they'll blast all the area around my landing-place as soon as they can get bombs here. But it's been a long time already."

Then he considered, and said more grimly still:

"I imagine that I had a rocket with a bomb on board, trailing me all the time—all the way back from the island. The rocket changed from time to time, but always there was a bomb ready. Yet after I did land, the pilot had to putter around in the rainstorm a while before he could find out just where to drop the bomb from, to have it land just right and still have him out of the blast. If they went to all that trouble to track me home, they'll really go to town on the place I landed! Right?"

Halliday was hiking, with all the others after him. To get well away from the neighborhood of the camp.

"They'll bomb the surface of the ground," added Brett, "to knock in any caves or other installations we may hide in. And then I think they'll do some

water-burst bombs to make sure that everything dies—nothing being supposed to be alive—in the biggest area they can imagine us as being in. It sounds extreme, but I think they'll do it. They mean business!"

Halliday nodded and continued to hike.

Janney, behind him, said: "There's no day and no night, and the trades blow all the time. But the trades should pick up a little after Elektra rises. More heat. If they want maximum spread of their radioactives, they'll wait for that. They ought to think us pretty well smashed."

"We will move slanting inland," said Halliday, irritably. "There are mountains. There could be updrafts on the slopes to carry even atomic fall-outs over our heads."

BRETT said no more. They toiled through the forest. There were places where the underbrush was thick, and they moved at a snail's pace or worse. But there were other places where gigantic solemn treetrunks rose from shadows so deep that there was heavy twilight and no undergrowth at all. The rain had ended so recently that all trees still dripped. But there was one variety of tree which seemed somehow to gather up water in its broad leaves as if they were cups, and then let it all go at once. Brett never knew the mechanism, but there were times when water plunged down in coherent masses of gallons. When such a mass of water hit a man, it could knock him down. Sometimes it did. At all times the ground in such shadowed places was practically mud, which clung to their feet and made walking heavy.

Brett found Kent struggling along beside him, phlegmatic as always. Brett said dispassionately:

"If they land and try to track us down on foot they'd have an easy job of it. Look at the trail we're leaving! And if they had dogs, we'd be finished! They'd find us!"

Kent's features lighted up. Brett had never seen him so animated before.

"Dogs," said Kent pleasedly, "that's something I know something about! Look here. You say it's desert on Aspasia where these creatures after us come from?"

"That's right," said Brett.

"Then they'll have dogs or something similar!" said Kent in happy authority. "That I know about! You take a savage who hunts with weapons, he'll have to start as a hunter to get the idea of weapons, with tools coming later. When he lives in the jungle, he lives by stalking. A dog's no good for stalking! You can't train an animal to keep quiet while his prey blunders nearer and nearer and then changes his mind and walks away. A dog's for open-country hunting. You see? He's to run ahead and bring the hunted creature to bay, and dance about him, barking, until the man comes up and kills the beast. Where you find open country you find dogs. Deserts, too! The Arabs used to have wonderful dogs! So the creatures on Aspasia would need dogs before they got civilized, and they'd keep them after. We did!"

Brett went through a pool of water. Everybody had to wade through that pool.

"Suppose the Aspasians run faster than their—ah—dogs?" he asked drily, though he knew better. He still was not able to believe that the girl he'd seen on the island, and whose picture was in his pocket, was an Aspasian. The evidence was past questioning, but he couldn't accept it. "Suppose they could run as fast as their prey?"

"Then they'd never get civilized," said Kent promptly, beaming. "Nobody gets civilized unless he gains by it. Unless he needs to! If our ancestors had been able to run down the creatures they hunted, they'd never have bothered with more than clubs. We'd be trotting after rabbits back on Earth, you and I, instead of being here. Eh?"

"I never thought—" Brett stopped.

THE ground quivered underfoot. A distinct, unsettled quivering. A tree branch snapped somewhere and came crashing to the ground. The marching party of twelve men stopped and listened. "Long seconds later the sound came. It was a crashing, horrific roar. The leaves quivered overhead and a shower of water fell down from among the boughs.

"A bomb," acknowledged Halliday, looking up from his wrist-chronometer. "But well away." He added firmly, "A solid-ground burst. They will bracket their first bomb-crater on all sides. Then they'll drench the area with radioactives from seawater. We will push on."

He led on. Brett trudged after him. Half an hour later there was another bomb. The delay was almost proof that Halliday had been right about the solid-ground aspect. A bomb to be aimed for a particular spot had to wait for the radiation from a previous bomb to clear away from where it had to be to drop another.

Four times, as they struggled through the forest, they heard the detonations. If some Thalassian hideaway had brought survivors through the years of poisoned atmosphere, and if descendants of its original occupants had at long last come out to the light of day, why, that bombing should end any chance of further emergencies. If in addition an area miles wide and deep was made uninhabitable by spray—then all danger of the return of life to Thalassia at that place would become unthinkable.

The men marched on. Hours passed. They began to lag and stumble when they reached the foothills inland. There Halliday allowed a halt. They had come nearly fifteen miles from the place where the cave-branch ended. They were exhausted.

Brett regarded the packs each man had made up for himself. There were oddities. Belmont carried four Geiger counters and their power-packs. The packs were negligible in weight, but the utility of Geiger counters to fugitives on

Chios was debatable. Janney had his thermometers and his barograph—Brett saw him winding it—besides a heavy notebook and his food. Another pack included two cameras and an absurd load of film. There was a neat assortment of insulated wire strapped to another pack still, and a tiny pick and whisk for uncovering archaeological specimens. Every man in the Expedition had brought along something representative of his specialty. But Brett doubted that there was a saw or an axe or a good-sized knife in the company.

He himself was carrying his reproduction of an ancient bazooka, and his pockets were stuffed with the one-inch plastic rocket-shells he'd made for it to fire. Since there were no living animals on the planet, and their enemies were armed with atomic bombs, he was no more rational than the rest.

AFTER a time, Brett moved up to where Halliday stretched wearily on the ground. Halliday was probably the oldest man of the dozen, but he had forced the pace until even the younger men were weary.

"I still feel disgraced," said Brett, "but I wanted to ask you something."

Halliday said sharply, "I authorized your journey to the island, and I told you that I considered the manner of your return quite sound. If there was a mistake—and there was—I share in it. But what do you want to ask?"

Brett hesitated, and shrugged.

"I suppose it is, whither are we drifting? We've got six months to wait before a ship comes for us. When it comes, it will probably be attacked, and we've no way to warn it. We haven't more than a ghost of a chance of living six months, for that matter. I'd just like to know if you have any plans for our survival and ultimate rescue."

Halliday sputtered. Then he said, in irritation, "Carstairs, there is a time to act and a time to plan! At the moment, we need to act simply to gain time to plan! I do have plans for survival for

the moment. I do not have plans as yet for contact with the rescue-ship when it comes. But I have months in which to think that out! I shall deal with it in due order of importance. The essential thing at this moment is to get out of the area those damned Aspasians are going to drench with sea-spray! We have, to be precise, to get them off our tails so we can take measures for the future!"

Brett smiled warmly at the older man. Halliday was bluffing, but it was a good bluff. Brett liked it. He said, "I was just talking to Kent. Putting myself in the enemy's place."

Halliday's eyebrows rose.

"Well?"

"If Earth's old civilization had been smashed from a planet like—say—Thalassia," said Brett, "and we'd managed, we thought, to wipe out the Thalassians, and we'd built up our culture again but were still scared of them, so we made a journey across space to make sure . . . and if we found creatures on the planet that we thought were our old enemies, we'd do exactly what the Aspasians have done. And we'd do one thing more."

Halliday said irritably:

"Come to the point! What would we do?"

"We'd send home for dogs," said Brett. "And we'd go around the outside of the area we'd made dead'y, and make sure that our enemies hadn't come out on foot. We'd know they hadn't flown out. But the dogs would tell us if they'd walked out."

Halliday stared. Then he groaned.

"Carstairs! You drive me mad! You think of the damndest things!"

Brett amended hurriedly, "The only thing is that since Aspasia is mostly desert, it's not likely they'd have much experience in following a scent that was faulted by running water."

"Go away!" snapped Halliday. "And don't come talking to me unless you think of something else!"

In ten minutes more he rose and summoned the party to further journeying.

The pause had seemed to stiffen unaccustomed muscle, but they started off. In twenty minutes they came to a small stream. Halliday faced back.

"We walk in this brook," he said peevishly, "in case we are trailed with scent-trailing animals from Aspasia! No one is to put a foot on dry land under any circumstances!"

He led the way downstream. Two miles, and the brook was joined by a slightly larger one. Halliday turned and traced it back toward its source. He was followed by all the line of burdened figures, splashing wearily in his wake.

AN HOUR later the ground trembled underfoot. They were well up in the hills then. They looked. An enormous column of darkness still uncoiled toward the sky, and as they stared it spread to the familiar mushroom shape. It would be thirty thousand feet high, on this planet of less-than-Earth gravity.

Halliday went on. . . and on . . . and on. The ground shook again. Later it shook still again and again. There was a wall of gruesome darkness against the sky. It loomed many times higher than mountains. They were looking at the row of dark stalks through unsubstantial giants of ferns when a seventh column arose.

They went on. They climbed and waded and waded and climbed. They came to a narrow pass between two mountain-flanks. A stream gushed out of the mountainside and fell forty feet and then came splashing down among stones.

It wasn't the end of their watery highway. There was a pool below it. There were two streams flowing from the pool. They had followed one up to this spot. Now they followed the other down to the far side of the mountains.

But the atomic cloud was moving inland. They looked up behind them, and looming far above the range they had crossed there was the misty forefront of the cloud of death. It was composed of

water-vapor lifted up for miles and blown to droplets and those blown to smaller ones until it was the thinnest of fogs—but still deadly.

Halliday stared pugnaciously up at it. Then he chuckled.

"Gentlemen," he said with a jerky gesture, "there is an omen if you happen to be superstitious. I advise it in this case for the pleasure it brings. Elektra must be above the horizon, though we cannot see it for this next range of hills. But its light strikes the atom-cloud. And—do you not see a rainbow?"

It was not a very good rainbow, but it was there. It was strong in the red, and lurid in the yellow, but the blue was deficient. Still, it was a rainbow.

When they halted for the equivalent of a night's rest, Halliday called Brett to him with a crook of his finger.

"Yes?" said Brett.

"I appoint you," said Halliday firmly, "to work out a plan. You irritate me, but you think of things. Now I'm assigning you something to think about full time."

"I'll try," said Brett. "What is it?"

Halliday puffed a little. He was not a young man. He was exhausted. But his manner was dour and irritable as always.

"I think we are clear for the moment," he said peevishly. "If that damned atomic cloud will only settle over the trail, and cover the footprints we left before we began walking in stream beds—if that happens, they'll believe us dead."

"They should," agreed Brett.

"But," rasped Halliday, "it will not follow that they will think they have killed all Thalassians—such as they think us—in killing us few. They will hunt this continent over!"

"It looks like it," admitted Brett. "After all, they've only seen one man—me."

"Yes," snapped Halliday. "There is only one answer. Put your mind on it. Find some way to make friends with them!"

VI

The continent Chios is . . . the only considerable land-mass on the planet. It is densely covered with vegetation, and its former inhabitants must have had cultivated crops and very probably a dense population. However, its constant daylight negates the idea of the introduction of Earth plants, and the poor flavor and indifferently quality of such edible plants as are known makes subsistence on its native products a far from attractive prospect. In case of emergency, nourishment will be found in. . . —*Astrographic Bureau Publication 11297. Appendix to Space Pilot, Vol. 460. Sector XXXIV, p. 80.*

THERE was no night or day upon Thalassia. In theory, at this particular part of its year, the sun Elektra rose from somewhere along its southeastern horizon and for not quite one hundred and fifty hours crept upward in the eastern sky, and then for the same length of time descended slowly toward the northeast. As it set, the star-clustered Canis Venetici rose in the southwest and rose for a similar number of hours and declined for the same to the northwest. At other seasons these directions were reversed, and there was also a time when the sun rose due south and set due north. Then there were eclipses. All of which resulted from the fact that Thalassia and Aspasia revolved about each other once in twenty-five days (Earth measurement) with their common axis in the plane of the ecliptic, and had no diurnal rotation at all. But the important thing was that Thalassia had no clear-cut day and night.

Wherefore time passed confusingly. The twelve who had come to study the fallen civilization of the planet had become fugitives, without hope. They had no shelter and did not know which of some few coarse fruits could be eaten, and there were half a dozen varieties of fresh-water fish that were not unwholesome. The absence of fruit-eating birds or animals had resulted in eight thousand years without natural selection, and had produced part of this situation.

The fresh-water fish, incidentally, were mostly recent adaptations of marine forms which had moved into the ecological niches left when the brooks and rivers of Chios ran deadly poison down to the sea. Eating grew monotonous for the twelve who hid.

And there was no alternation of day and night. It seemed to Brett that their purposeless migration went on for years. They marched until they were tired, and lay down and slept, and got up and marched until they were tired again. They grew whiskery and unkempt, and they loathed the food they had to eat, and all ideas of time lapsed in the unending day.

Objectively, they crossed a wide valley and came to an inland mountain-chain, and followed that southward. Nothing of any consequence happened at any time. Once they saw a spot where an obvious bomb-crater had been blasted into the side of a mountain. It made a gigantic scar which even eight thousand years had not healed over. But that discovery, like all others, had no meaning.

Then, one day—one march—one period—in which they were all awake—they came to a broad valley which would surely have made a perfect location for a city. And it had been. The center was gone, blasted flat and covered with jungle. But about the edges of the obliterated blast-area there were crumbling structures of stone. There were tumbling walls, and terraces distorted by tree-roots, and other matters of that kind. The Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition could not resist the lure of it. They carefully did not talk about the complete hopelessness of their position, but here were ruined artifacts and structures, and they yearned over them.

So they stopped to dig, and poke, and pry, and measure and zestfully to dispute with each other over the meaning of this architectural feature and that. It was not a reasonable thing to do, but there was no purpose in being reasonable.

BRETT CARSTAIRS could not join them. He could deduce the technical processes of former years, but there was nothing for him to work on. He tended to brood over the futility of all things and to think of the girl. Her existence was undeniable. She must be rejoicing in the conviction that he had been killed. And Brett, looking at her likeness, did not rejoice.

On the second day they saw a ship of the enemy. It was a new-type ship, and it was evidently hunting for signs of living things. It was not a rocket, this time. Rockets move fast, but in atmosphere they are not economical of fuel, and on Thalassia all fuel had to be brought across space. So this was a new type ship.

It was melon-shaped, with pointed ends. Its round sides glinted silver. It moved very deliberately indeed, almost hovering. There were ports along its bottom, but not elsewhere. It moved by occasional jettings of rocket-fuel from astern.

Brett called sharply, and men passed the word. Within seconds the personnel of the Expedition was invisible, hiding behind bushes and trees. Brett slipped down to join them where they stared at the vessel hungrily. They were a disreputable crew, now. Nobody shaved. They did not look like a scientific group. Not at all.

"It's a spaceship all right," said Kent dispiritedly. "But is it ours?"

Halliday snapped, "Human spacecraft aren't streamlined. No sense in streamlining for a vacuum. That's an Aspasian ship—hunting us!"

Something teasing and vague and annoying tickled the back of Brett's mind.

"Now why," mused Janney, "does it use rockets? Rockets won't move a mass like that! It must be two hundred feet long! Thousands of tons!"

The rockets of the ship flared again. It was silvery. It had ports only in the bottom. Brett saw a long cord dangling from its forward pointed end. Why should a spaceship have a cord dangling

from its bow? And it moved visibly faster when its rockets fired. No rocket could visibly stir a mass of thousands of tons, such as a two-hundred-foot spaceship. No such small rockets as this, anyhow! It approached the mountains.

Its bow suddenly whipped around all of ten degrees, and then slowly swung back. Then Brett noticed that the ship was not moving along the line of its own axis. It did not progress precisely where it pointed. It also moved a trifle sideways, as if something pushed laterally against it while it forged ahead. Such movement was impossible in a spaceship weighing thousands of tons. . . .

Then the fact clicked in Brett's mind. He cried out.

"They are twentieth-century technologists! That's no spaceship—it's a dirigible!"

Halliday blinked.

Brett's words almost tumbled over each other, "It's a balloon, Halliday! It's a bag filled with helium, and pushed by a rocket! An old, forgotten way of traveling by air! It was in use for less than half a century! They didn't need motors to stay aloft! They float! The Aspasians have sent for them because they don't have fliers! They use these dirigible balloons at home, and rockets for space-travel! Now that they need to make an exhaustive hunt, they sent for these!"

THINGS fitted together now. Aspasias was a desert planet. Fliers would never be developed in a desert area, of course. Their motors would be unreliable, at first, and over desert country a failed motor would mean a dead passenger. But balloons would float on, even if their motors failed, until some inhabited area was reached. Of course! To make a painstaking, inch-by-inch search of a continent, the primitive Aspasians would import these balloons, and they would be effective.

The silvery, melon-shaped object rose and fell in a gust of wind past a mountain-peak. The rockets jetted furiously and it climbed against the wind and

went over the mountains and away. Brett racked his brains for details of this forgotten mode of transportation.

Next mealtime his idea came to him. The food was even less appetizing than usual. There would be food in that dirigible balloon. It would be the only palatable foodstuff in hundreds of miles.

He led Halliday aside.

"I propose a gamble," he told the Expedition's leader. "It could get us all killed. Or it could get us something we could probably eat. Or—it might be a way to make friends. Do you want to take a chance?"

"Probably," said Halliday, frowning. "What is the idea?"

Halliday was emaciated, now. The food and the journeying on foot had not been good for him. But he was still the leader.

"The firing-plaza was booby-trapped—" said Brett persuasively—"and the cave. So this city's probably booby-trapped, too! Now, if we can only make sure. . . ."

It was a hairbrained scheme. It was not at all the sort of project that would be authorized in a sombre policy-conference before an expedition set out from Earth. One had to be desperate and half-starved and practically without hope in order to conceive of it. But Brett made it sound remarkably plausible. At that, however, Halliday pointed out that it might not work and might lead instead to an unbearable concentration of search just where they were.

But he approved it.

So Belmont abandoned archaeology and went over the center of the city with his Geiger counters. The man who'd brought insulated wire with him, because he wanted to, made investigations. Eventually he contrived an induction balance. With that and knowledge learned from the booby-trap in the cavern which had not gone off, he determined facts about underground arrangements that had not been disturbed for centuries. There were four bombs underground. It should be possible to set

them off. . . .

The Expedition became feverishly busy up on a mountainside. The electronicists constructed an object of wire strung on sticks cut from small trees with pocket-knives. He proudly detailed the mathematical principles involved in the reflection of a tight beam of high-frequency electricity. A communications man magnificently took a hand-light—brought nobody knew why through the perpetual day of Thalassia—and used stray objects from the pockets of the others to make a generator of microwaves out of iron particles in vegetable oil. It strongly resembled the apparatus with which Hertz first demonstrated the existence of electromagnetic radiation in the nineteenth century. The hand-lamp battery, of course, would give some hundreds of watts power for a few seconds only.

Then the Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition devoted itself to the project of building the largest possible stock of dry branches and brushwood. Twelve men worked at it for three days. They planned, indeed, as if for a forest fire.

When the time came, Brett set light to the key area and made for the mountainside. He was halfway there before the brushfuse burned to produce an appreciable quantity of smoke. Then it abruptly began to pour out thick, curling masses of brown vapor which was not supposed to rise from the surface of Thalassia, because there should be nobody living there.

WHEN he reached the ledge on the mountainside where the Expedition waited, the whiskery and disreputable-seeming characters there were fairly dancing with excitement. But for a long, long time nothing happened. Smoke rose up in a column toward the sky. It was visible for a very great distance indeed. But nobody came—for two hours.

Then Halliday fairly squealed in agitation:

"There's a ship!" he cried. "They saw

it! It's coming!"

And from far over the mountains a ship was coming with jets of rocket-fumes behind it. It bounced in the wind-currents of the mountains. It came nearer, arriving at a point five miles from the brushwood fire. It swept around to see it from upwind closer to where the Expedition hopped and squirmed in its agitation. It was four miles from the mountain-flank and still coming. It was midway between the Expedition and the blaze which now covered half a square mile of jungle.

"Try Booby-trap One," commanded Brett eagerly. "If it misses try the rest in turn! And don't look—"

The members of the Expedition sank down behind sheltering boulders. Brett, himself, ducked to where he was sheltered from direct sight of the booby-trap area, but where he could still see the bobbing airship. Brett shielded his eyes with his hands against the possible light flash.

The electronicist at the tight-beam projector ducked his head and stabbed twin wires together. There was a sharp, harsh, buzzing sound. Down in the valley where the induction-balance had said a bomb lay buried, a beam of high-frequency radio waves hit hard. They were very much like the waves a trinod beacon had given off at Firing Plaza One. They induced high-frequency currents underground.

This was the fierce bright light of the dawn of time, with all the cosmos turned incandescent for an instant. The ground rose up and bumped Brett fiercely. Then there was a sound as of doomsday, and rocks and pebbles rolled and clattered down the mountainside.

Brett saw the shock wave of the explosion hit the dirigible. It was not a sound-wave, but an expanding sphere of pure compression. He saw the silvery, seemingly solid-metal but actual cloth bag dent in, exactly as if pushed inward by a giant thumb.

Then the balloon popped like a rubber toy.

The atom-bomb cloud rose and rose to the high heavens. It formed a mushroom-shape. But the tradewinds blew over the mountain-tops as over Thalassia's sea. The cloud curled and curved, and lightnings flashed and thunder rolled in it. But it would go away inland, too.

The Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition plunged down the mountainside in a yelling small horde before the balloon had reached the ground. It was a remarkable descent for the balloon, at that. Its bag had been burst in a single monstrous rip, but it did not crash headlong. As the whole object plummeted, the bag-material caught in the stiffening framework inside its former hull. It acted, though inadequately, to check the fall. The balloon reeled and swayed because of that parachuting action, and it crashed into the branches of a great tree, and after a fashion skidded out of them, and landed in a tangle of splintering brace-members on the ground.

BRETT lost sight of it as he plunged down, with the reproduction of an antique bazooka in his hand. He used it as a rod, in his haste. Then he ran, and so did all the others until, panting, they came in sight of the debris.

But they saw something more than debris. There was the brightly-clad figure of one of the ship's crew on the ground. Another figure worked furiously, not at the spilled-out body but at something caught in the splintered framework. It came clear. It was a ball of considerable size. It loosened and came free as if it had been designed to be dropped. The straining figure pushed it fiercely until it was near the prone figure on the ground. Then the laboring stopped, and that crew-member stared desperately at the sky, and then fiercely all around.

Halliday groaned between pantings.

"A damned atomic bomb!" he gasped. "They'll set it off—to take us with them—"

Brett raged. Then he heard his own

voice shouting:

"Spread out, everybody! Show yourselves, but don't go closer!"

The figure heard his shout. It whirled upon him. It saw him and his companions. But they stayed behind. And Brett would have shouted again, but that his breath had left him.

He walked on, swallowing his reproduction of an ancient bazooka dangling in his hand. The figure by the object that must be a bomb—was a girl. It was the girl whose picture he had in his pocket, or at the least her identical twin. And she regarded him with evident hostility.

Brett walked forward, trying to get his breath back and his mind straight. He'd thought of food, but now he thought of something else. . . .

The figure on the ground stirred feebly. It turned its head. It was a man. Human. Bearded. . . . bearded! This particular situation was agonizing. In inherited, acquired, instinctive, legendary and religious hatred of all things Thalassian, this girl was prepared to set off that atom bomb. She would die in the flame, but so would he. At the moment, the other eleven members of the Thalassia-Aspasia Expedition might not. She waited impatiently for them to come closer.

Brett stopped. She moved toward the bomb, turning only to regard him with eyes that seemed to flame. She reached out her hand.

And Johnny did the only possible, the obvious and the inevitable thing.

Brett blew it up.

His action was instinctive, but also it was sound sense, because an atomic bomb contains remarkably little explosive. It is different from all other bombs in that what explosive it does contain exists only to move slugs of fissionable material into a critical mass which then detonates. There is no atomic explosive unless there is a critical mass. Until it is actually fired, an atomic bomb is a rather delicate piece of mechanism only.

Brett's bazooka-shell hit the case. The

rocket-fuel in the shell blew. It smashed in the case. It jammed the delicate mechanism. The actual explosive in the bomb flared smokily, but it was not even enough to singe the girl beside it. And Brett plunged forward and grabbed her before she could take any further measures.

THERE was great confusion, and then Kent came to Brett and said slowly, "That whiskered man's got a broken leg. Better set it, eh?"

"I would," agreed Brett. He stared at the girl, both of whose wrists he held firmly. She returned his gaze with eyes which had ceased to burn as flames, and now were filled with an absolute, stunned astonishment.

Halliday came up a little later.

"Carstairs!" he said irritably. "That man with a beard—he is a man, isn't he?"

"I hope so!" said Brett with deep earnestness.

He continued to look at the girl. She opened her mouth to catch her breath in purest bewilderment.

"He's been pulling our beards!" said Halliday angrily. "He seemed astonished when we set his leg. He almost fainted when he counted our fingers. I can see that. We've got five fingers and the Thalassians had six! But why the devil should he want to pull beards? Every one of us, separately! He can't seem to get over the fact that we have five fingers and grow whiskers! He's got a beard too!"

"Maybe," said Brett, "the Thalassians didn't have beards. Which may be why he wears one. Maybe—I'll see."

Gently and respectfully but very firmly, he lifted the girl's right hand to his chin. She had already stared at his fingers. Now she grabbed at his beard. And though Brett's beard was no more than half an inch long, she pulled it hard.

She called in an excited, agitated voice to the bearded man whose leg was now in splints. Then she addressed Brett,

pouring out a flood of unintelligible phrases.

Halliday looked on with a cynical relief.

"She seems now," he observed, "to be neither notably ferocious nor remarkably afraid. I suspect that if you turn her loose she will probably signal for help. I only hope she'll explain that we aren't Thalassians and that we have five fingers and pullable beards! I'd never have guessed that the way to make friends with this people was shoot at an atom bomb and let my fingers be counted and my whiskers yanked to the roots!"

"Yes," said Brett absorbedly. He loosened his grip on the girl's wrists. She looked at him with bright, still-surprised eyes. She looked pleased, too. Almost happy.

"Carstairs!" fumed Halliday. "See if you can ask her how the hell human beings got out here—dammit, Carstairs, talk to her and find out what we've got to know or go crazy! They can't come from earth! Where the devil did they come from?"

"I'm—getting ready to ask now," said Brett.

He fumbled in his pocket and found the locket he'd picked up on Firing Plaza Number One. He handed it to the girl. She exclaimed, and called something to the bearded man. He grunted, staring at the hands and beards of the members of the Expedition and plainly making painful but drastic readjustments of all his previous opinions. The girl looked back at Brett, expectantly. He beamed suddenly. She smiled back, flashing her white teeth.

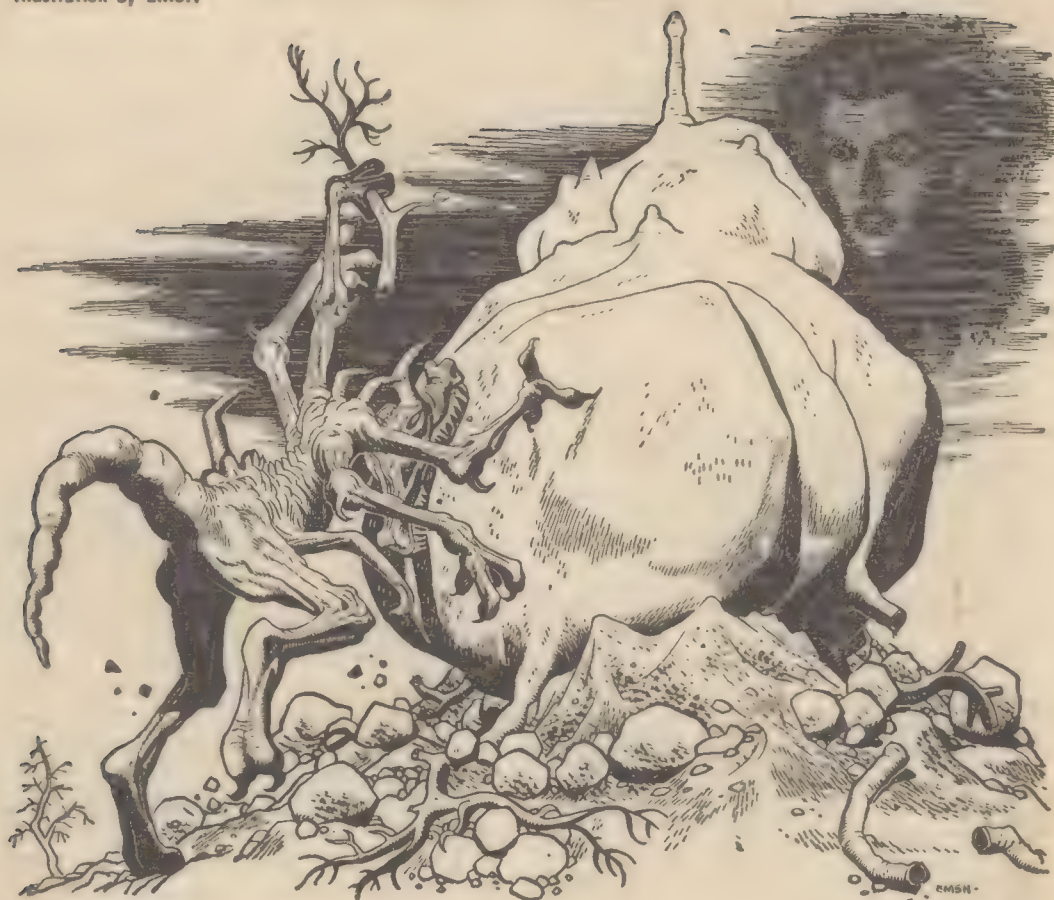
He tapped himself on the chest, slowly, significantly.

"Brett," he said.

She cocked her head on one side, puzzled. Then she brightened. She tapped him on the chest.

"Br-r-rette!" she said happily.

Communication between theoretically intelligent beings of two different star-systems had begun. ● ● ●



PHIL FARMER'S unorthodox story *MOTHER* produced considerable coruscation among the cognoscenti, who recognized in it a break from tradition even greater than that in his widely publicized *THE LOVERS*. (*STARTLING STORIES*, August 1952) *MOTHER* did a little Freudian probing into Man, which went beyond that generally found in fiction. It also created a remarkable new character in the "mother" creatures about which discussion has since raged. Now, with a dazzling change of pace, Farmer takes up the career of one of "mother's" daughters. Any resemblance to a well-known fairy tale you might discern here is intentional and premeditated, for reasons which will shortly become clear as you read.

—The Editor

DAUGHTER

A Sequel to MOTHER

CQ! CQ!

This is Mother Hardhead pulsing.

Keep quiet, all you virgins and Mothers, while I communicate. Listen, listen, all you who are hooked into this broadcast. Listen, and I will tell you how I left my Mother, how my two sisters and I grew our shells, how I dealt with the olfway, and why I have become the Mother with the most prestige, the strongest shell, the most powerful broadcaster and beamer, and the pulser of a new language.

First, before I tell my story, I will reveal to all you who do not know it that my father was a mobile.

Yes, do not be nervequivered. That is a so-story. It is not a not-so-story.

Father was a mobile.

MOTHER pulsed, "Get out!"

Then, to show she meant business, she opened her exit-iris.

That sobered us up and made us realize how serious she was. Before, when she snapped open her iris, she did it so we could practise pulsing at the other young crouched in the doorway to their Mother's wombs, or else send a respectful message to the Mothers themselves, or even a quick one to Grandmother, far away on a mountainside. Not that she received, I think, because we young were too weak to transmit that far. Anyway, Grandmother never acknowledged receipt.

At time, when Mother was annoyed because we would all broadcast at once instead of asking her permission to speak one at a time or because we would crawl up the sides of her womb and then drop

off the ceiling onto the floor with a thud, she would pulse at us to get out and build our own shells. She meant it, she said.

Then, according to our mood, we would either settle down or else get more boisterous. Mother would reach out with her tentacles and hold us down and spank us. If that did no good, she would threaten us with the olfway. That did the trick. That is, until she used him too many times. After a while, we got so we didn't believe there was an olfway. Mother, we thought, was creating a not-so-story. We should have known better, however, for Mother loathed not-so-stories.

Another thing that quivered her nerves was our conversation with Father in Orsemay. Although he had taught her his language, he refused to teach her Orsemay. When he wanted to send messages to us that he knew she wouldn't approve, he would pulse at us in our private language. That was another thing, I think, that finally made Mother so angry she cast us out despite Father's pleadings that we be allowed to remain four more seasons.

You must understand that we virgins had remained in the womb far longer than we should have. The cause for our overstay was Father.

He was the mobile.

Yes, I know what you're going to reply. All fathers, you will repeat, are mobiles.

But he was father. He was the *pulsing* mobile.

Yes, he could, too. He could pulse with the best of us. Or maybe he *him-*

By **PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER**

self couldn't. Not directly. We pulse with organs in our body. But Father, if I understand him correctly, used a creature of some kind which was separate from his body. Or maybe it was an organ that wasn't attached to him.

Anyway, he had no internal organs or pulse-stalks growing from him to pulse with. He used this creature, this r-a-d-i-o, as he called it. And it worked just fine.

When he conversed with Mother, he did so in Motherpulse or in his own language, mobilepulse. With us he used Orsemay. That's like mobile-pulse, only a little different. Mother never did figure out the difference.

When I finish my story, dearie, I'll teach you Orsemay. I've been beamed that you've enough prestige to join our Highest Hill sorority and thus learn our secret communication.

Mother declared Father had two means of pulsing. Besides his radio, which he used to communicate with us, he could pulse in another and totally different manner. He didn't use dot-deet-dit-dashes, either. His pulses needed air to carry them, and he sent them with the same organ he ate with. Boils one's stomach to think of it, doesn't it?

Father was caught while passing by my Mother. She didn't know what mating-lust perfume to send downwind towards him so he would be lured within reach of her tentacles. She had never smelled a mobile like him before. But he did have an odor that was similar to that of another kind of mobile, so she wafted that towards him. It seemed to work, because he came close enough for her to seize him with her extra-uterine tentacles and pop him into her shell.

LATER, after I was born, Father radioed me—in Orsemay, of course, so Mother wouldn't understand—that he had smelled the perfume and that it, among other things, had attracted him. But the odor had been that of a hairy tree-climbing mobile, and he had wondered what such creatures were doing

on a bare hill-top. When he learned to converse with Mother, he was surprised that she had identified him with that mobile.

Ah, well, he pulsed, it is not the first time a female has made a monkey of a man.

He also informed me that he had thought Mother was just an enormous boulder on top of the hill. Not until a section of the supposed rock opened out was he aware of anything out of the ordinary or that the boulder was her shell and held her body within. Mother, he radioed, is something like a dinosaur-sized snail, or jellyfish, equipped with organs that generate radar and radio waves and with an egg-shaped chamber big as the living room of a bungalow, a womb in which she bears and raises her young.

I didn't understand more than half of these terms of course. Nor was Father able to explain them satisfactorily.

He did make me promise not to pulse Mother that he had thought she was just a big lump of mineral. Why, I don't know.

Father puzzled Mother. Though he fought her when she dragged him in, he had no claws or teeth sharp enough to tear her conception-spot. Mother tried to provoke him further, but he refused to react. When she realized that he was a pulse-sending mobile, and released him to study him, he wandered around the womb. After a while he caught on to the fact that Mother was beaming from her womb pulse-stalk. He learned how to talk with her by using his detachable organ, which he termed a panrad. Eventually, he taught her his language, mobile-pulse. When Mother learned that and informed other Mothers about that, her prestige became the highest in all the area. No Mother had ever thought of a new language. The idea stunned them.

Father said he was the only communicating mobile on this world. His s-p-a-c-e-s-h-i-p had crashed, and he would now remain forever with Mother.

Father learned the dinnerpulses when

Mother summoned her young playing about her womb. He radioed the proper message. Mother's nerves were quivered by the idea that he was semantic, but she opened her stew-iris and let him eat. Then Father held up fruit or other objects and let Mother beam at him with her wombstalk what the proper dotdit-deetdashes were for each. Then he would repeat on his panrad the name of the object to verify it.

Mother's sense of smell helped her, of course. Sometimes, it is hard to tell the difference between an apple and a peach just by pulsing it. Odors aid you.

She caught on fast. Father told her she was very intelligent—for a female. That quivered her nerves. She wouldn't pulse with him for several mealperiods after that.

ONE thing that Mother especially liked about Father was that when conception-time came, she could direct him what to do. She didn't have to depend on luring a non-semantic mobile into her shell with perfumes and then hold it to her conception-spot while it scratched and bit the spot in its efforts to fight its way from the grip of her tentacles. Father had no claws, but he carried a detachable claw. He named it an s-c-a-l-p-e-l.

When I asked him why he had so many detachable organs, he replied that he was a man of parts.

Father was always talking nonsense.

But he had trouble understanding Mother, too.

Her reproductive processes amazed him.

"By G-o-d," he beamed, "who'd believe it? That a healing process in a wound would result in conception? Just the opposite of cancer."

When we were adolescents and about ready to be shoved out of Mother's shell, we received Mother asking Father to mangle her spot again. Father replied no. He wanted to wait another four seasons. He had said farewell to two broods of his young, and he wanted to

keep us around longer so he could give us a real education and enjoy us instead of starting to raise another group of virgins.

This refusal quivered Mother's nerves and upset her stew-stomach so that our food was sour for several meals. But she didn't act against him. He gave her too much prestige. All the Mothers were dropping Motherpulse and learning mobile from Mother as fast as she could teach it.

I asked, "What's prestige?"

"When you send, the others have to receive. And they don't dare pulse back until you're through and you give your permission."

"Oh, I'd like prestige!"

Father interrupted, "Little Hardhead, if you want to get ahead, you tune in to me. I'll tell you a few things even your Mother can't. After all, I'm a mobile, and I've been around."

And he would outline what I had to expect once I left him and Mother and how, if I used my brain, I could survive and eventually get more prestige than even Grandmother had.

Why he called me Hardhead, I don't know. I was still a virgin and had not, of course, grown a shell. I was as soft-bodied as any of my sisters. But he told me he was f-o-n-d of me because I was so hard-headed. I accepted the statement without trying to grasp it.

Anyway, we got eight extra seasons in Mother because Father wanted it that way. We might have gotten some more, but when winter came again, Mother insisted Father mangle her spot. He replied he wasn't ready. He was just beginning to get acquainted with his children—he called us Sluggos—and, after we left, he'd have nobody but Mother to talk to until the next brood grew up.

Moreover, she was starting to repeat herself and he didn't think she appreciated him like she should. Her stew was too often soured or else so over-boiled that the meat was shredded into a neargoo.

That was enough for Mother.

"Get out!" she pulsed.

"Fine! And don't think you're throwing me out in the cold, either!" *zztd* back Father. "Yours is not the only shell in this world."

That made Mother's nerves quiver until her whole body shook. She put up her big outside stalk and beamed her sisters and aunts. The Mother across the valley confessed that, during one of the times Father had basked in the warmth of the s-u-n while lying just outside Mother's opened iris, she had asked him to come live with her.

Mother changed her mind. She realized that, with him gone, her prestige would die and that of the hussy across the valley would grow.

"Seems as if I'm here for the duration," radioed Father.

Then, "Whoever would think your Mother'd be j-e-a-l-o-u-s?"

Life with Father was full of those incomprehensible semantic groups. Too often he would not, or could not, explain.

For a long time Father brooded in one spot. He wouldn't answer us or Mother.

Finally, she became overquivered. We had grown so big and boisterous and sassy that she was one continual shudder. And she must have thought that as long as we were around to communicate with him, she had no chance to get him to rip up her spot.

So, out we went.

Before we passed forever from her shell, she warned, "Beware the olfway."

MY SISTERS ignored her, but I was impressed. Father had described the beast and its terrible ways. Indeed, he used to dwell so much on it that we young, and Mother, had dropped the old term for it and used Father's. It began when he reprimanded her for threatening us too often with the beast when we misbehaved.

"Don't 'cry wolf.'"

He then beamed me the story of the origin of that puzzling phrase. He did it in Orsemay, of course, because Mother

would lash him with her tentacles if she thought he was pulsing something that was not-so. The very idea of not-so strained her brain until she couldn't think straight.

I wasn't sure myself what not-so was, but I enjoyed his stories. And I, like the other virgins and Mother herself, began terming the killer "the olfway."

Anyway, after I'd beamed, "Good sending, Mother," I felt Father's strange stiff mobile-tentacles around me and something wet and warm falling from him onto me. He pulsed, "Good l-u-c-k, Hardhead. Send me a message via hook-up sometimes. And be sure to remember what I told you about dealing with the olfway."

I pulsed that I would. I left with the most indescribable feeling inside me. It was a nervequivering that was both good and bad, if you can imagine such a thing, dearie.

But I soon forgot it in the adventure of rolling down a hill, climbing slowly up the next one on my single foot, rolling down the other side, and so on. After about ten warm-periods, all my sisters but two had left me. They found hilltops on which to build their shells. But my two faithful sisters had listened to my ideas about how we should not be content with anything less than the highest hilltops.

"Once you've grown a shell, you stay where you are."

So they agreed to follow me.

But I led them a long, long ways, and they would complain that they were tired and sore and getting afraid of running into some meat-eating mobile. They even wanted to move into the empty shells of Mothers who had been eaten by the olfway or died when cancer, instead of young, developed in the conception-spots.

"Come on," I urged. "There's no prestige in moving into empties. Do you want to take bottom place in every community-pulsing just because you're too lazy to build your own covers?"

"But we'll resorb the empties and then

grow our own later on."

"Yes? How many Mothers have declared that? And how many have done it? Come on, Sluggos."

We kept getting into higher country. Finally, I scanned the set-up I was searching for. It was a small, flat-topped mountain with many hills around it. I crept up it. When I was on top, I test-beamed. Its summit was higher than any of the eminences for as far as I could reach. And I guessed that when I became adult and had much more power, I would be able to cover a tremendous area. Meanwhile, other virgins would sooner or later be moving in and occupying the lesser hills.

As Father would have expressed it, I was on top of the world.

IT HAPPENED that my little mountain was rich. The search-tendrils I grew and then sunk into the soil found many varieties of minerals. I could build from them a huge shell. The bigger the shell, the larger the Mother. The larger the Mother, the more powerful the pulse.

Moreover, I detected many large flying mobiles. Eagles, Father termed them. They would make good mates. They had sharp beaks and tearing talons.

Below, in a valley, was a stream. I grew a hollow-tendrill under the soil and down the mountainside until it entered the water. Then I began pumping it up to fill my stomachs.

The valley soil was good. I did what no other of our kind had ever done, what Father had taught me. My far-groping tendrils picked up seeds dropped by trees or flowers or birds and planted them. I spread an underground net of tendrils around an apple tree. But I didn't plan on passing the tree's fallen fruit from tendrill-frond to frond and so on up the slope and into my irises. I had a different destination in mind for them.

Meanwhile, my sisters had topped two hills much lower than mine. When I found out what they were doing, my nerves quivered. Both had built shells! One was glass; the other, cellulose!

"What do you think you're doing? Aren't you afraid of the olfway?"

"Pulse away, old grouch. Nothing's the matter with us. We're just ready for winter and mating-heat, that's all. We'll be Mothers, then, and you'll still be growing your big old shell. Where'll your prestige be? The others won't even pulse with you 'cause you'll still be a virgin and a half-shelled one at that!"

"Brittlehead! Woodenhead!"

"Yah! Yah! Hardhead!"

They were right—in a way. I was still soft and naked and helpless, an evergrowing mass of quivering flesh, a ready prey to any meat-eating mobile that found me. I was a fool and a gambler. Nevertheless, I took my leisure and sunk my tendrils and located ore and sucked up iron in suspension and built an inner shell larger, I think, than Grandmother's. Then I laid a thick sheath of copper over that, so the iron wouldn't rust. Over that I grew a layer of bone made out of calcium I'd extracted from the rocks thereabouts. Nor did I bother, as my sisters had done, to resorb my virgin's stalk and grow an adult one. That could come later.

Just as fall was going out, I finished my shells. Body-changing and growing began. I ate from my crops, and I had much meat, too, because I'd put up little cellulose latticework shells in the valley and raised many mobiles from the young that my far-groping tendrils had plucked from their nests.

I planned my structure with an end in mind. I grew my stomach much broader and deeper than usual. It was not that I was overly hungry. It was for a purpose, which I shall transmit to you later, dearie.

My stew-stomach was also much closer to the top of my shell than it is in most of us. In fact, I intentionally shifted my brain from the top to one side and raised the stomach in its place. Father had informed me I should take advantage of my ability to partially direct the location of my adult organs. It took me time, but I did it just before winter came.

Cold weather arrived.
And the olfway.

HE CAME as he always does, his long nose with its retractible antennae sniffing out the minute encrustations of pure minerals that we virgins leave on our trails. The olfway follows his nose to wherever it will take him. This time it led him to my sister who had built her shell of glass. I had suspected she would be the first to be contacted by an olfway. In fact, that was one of the reasons I had chosen a hilltop further down the line. The olfway always takes the closest shell.

When sister Glasshead detected the terrible mobile, she sent out wild pulse after pulse.

"What will I do? Do? Do?"

"Sit tight, sister, and hope."

Such advice was like feeding on cold stew, but it was the best, and the only, that I could give. I did not remind her that she should have followed my example, built a triple shell, and not been so eager to have a good time by gossiping with others.

The olfway prowled about, tried to dig underneath her base, which was on solid rock, and failed. He did manage to knock off a chunk of glass as a sample. Ordinarily, he would then have swallowed the sample and gone off to pupate. That would have given my sister a season of rest before he returned to attack. In the meanwhile, she might have built another coating of some other material and frustrated the monster for another season.

It just so happened that that particular olfway had, unfortunately for sister, made his last meal on a Mother whose covering had also been of glass. He retained his special organs for dealing with such mixtures of silicates. One of them was a huge and hard ball of some material on the end of his very long tail. Another was an acid for weakening the glass. After he had dripped that over a certain area, he battered her shell with the ball. Not long before the first snow-

fall he broke through her shield and got to her flesh.

Her wildly alternating beams and broadcasts of panic and terror still bounce around in my nerves when I think of them. Yet, I must admit my reaction was tinged with contempt. I do not think she had even taken the trouble to put boron oxide instead of silicon in her glass. If she had, she might. . . .

What's that? How dare you interrupt? . . . Oh, very well, I accept your humble apologies. Don't let it happen again, dearie. As for what you wanted to know, I'll describe later the substances that Father termed silicates and boron oxides and such. After my story is done.

To continue, the killer, after finishing Glasshead off, followed his nose along her trail back down the hill to the junction. There he had his choice of my other sister's or of mine. He decided on hers. Again he went through his pattern of trying to dig under her, crawling over her, biting off her pulse-stalks, and then chewing a sample of shell.

Snow fell hard. He crept off, sluggishly scooped a hole, and crawled in for the winter.

Sister Woodenhead grew another stalk. She exulted, "He found my shell too thick! He'll never get me!"

Ah, sister, if only you had received from Father and not spent so much time playing with the other Sluggos. Then you would have remembered what he taught. You would have known that an olfway, like us, is different from most creatures. The majority of beings have functions that depend upon their structures. But the olfway, that nasty creature, has a structure that depends upon his functions.

I did not quiver her nerves by telling her that, now that he had secreted a sample of her cellulose-shell in his body, he was pupating around it. Father had informed me that some arthropods follow a life-stage that goes from egg to larva to pupa to adult. When a caterpillar pupates in its cocoon, for instance,

practically its whole body dissolves, its tissues disintegrate. Then something reforms the pulpy whole into a structurally new creature with new functions, the butterfly.

The butterfly, however, never repupates. The olfway does. He parts company with his fellow arthropods in this peculiar ability. Thus, when he tackles a Mother, he chews off a tiny bit of the shell and goes to sleep with it. During a whole season, crouched in his den, he dreams around the sample—or his body does. His tissues melt and then coalesce. Only his nervous system remains intact, thus preserving the memory of his identity and what he has to do when he emerges from his hole.

So it happened. The olfway came out of his hole, nested on top of sister Woodhead's dome, and inserted a modified ovipositor into the hole left by again biting off her stalk. I could more or less follow his plan of attack, because the winds quite often blew my way, and I could sniff the chemicals he was dripping.

He pulped the cellulose with a solution of something or other, soaked it in some caustic stuff, and then poured on an evil-smelling fluid that boiled and bubbled. After that had ceased its violent action, he washed some more caustic on the enlarging depression and finished by blowing out the viscous solution through a tube. He repeated the process many times.

Though my sister, I suppose, desperately grew more cellulose, she was not fast enough. Relentlessly, the olfway widened the hole. When it was large enough, he slipped inside.

End of sister. . . .

THE whole affair of the olfway was lengthy. I was busy, and I gained time by something I had made even before I erected my dome. This was the false trail of encrustations that I had laid, one of the very things my sisters had mocked. They did not understand what I was doing when I then back-

tracked, a process which took me several days, and concealed with dirt my real track. But if they had lived, they would have comprehended. For the olfway turned off the genuine trail to my summit and followed the false.

Naturally, it led him to the edge of a cliff. Before he could check his swift pace, he fell off.

Somehow, he escaped serious injury and scrambled back up to the spurious path. Reversing, he found and dug up the cover over the actual tracks.

That counterfeit path was a good trick, one my Father taught me. Too bad it hadn't worked, for the monster came straight up the mountain, heading for me, his antennae plowing up the loose dirt and branches which covered my encrustations.

However, I wasn't through. Long before he showed up I had collected a number of large rocks and cemented them into one large boulder. The boulder itself was poised on the edge of the summit. Around its middle I had deposited a ring of iron, grooved to fit a rail of the same mineral. This rail led from the boulder to a point halfway down the slope. Thus, when the mobile had reached that ridge of iron and was following it up the slope, I removed with my tentacles the little rocks that kept the boulder from toppling over the edge of the summit.

MY WEAPON rolled down its track with terrific speed. I'm sure it would have crushed the olfway if he had not felt the rail vibrating with his nose. He sprawled aside. The boulder rushed by, just missing him.

Though disappointed, I did get another idea to deal with future olfways. If I deposited two rails halfway down the slope, one on each side of the main line, and sent three boulders down at the same time, the monster could leap aside from the center, either way, and still get it on the nose!

He must have been frightened, for I didn't pip him for five warm-periods

after that. Then he came back up the rail, not, as I had expected, up the opposite if much steeper side of the mountain. He was stupid, all right.

I want to pause here and explain that the boulder was my idea, not Father's. Yet I must add that it was Father, not Mother, who started me thinking original thoughts. I know it quivers all your nerves to think that a mere mobile, good for nothing but food and mating, could not only be semantic but could have a higher degree of semanticism.

I don't insist he had a higher quality. I think it was different, and that I got some of that difference from him.

To continue, there was nothing I could do while the olfway prowled about and sampled my shell. Nothing except hope. And hope, as I found out, isn't enough. The mobile bit off a piece of my shell's outer bone covering. I thought he'd be satisfied, and that, when he returned after pupating, he'd find the second sheath of copper. That would delay him until another season. Then he'd find the iron and have to retire again. By then it would be winter, and he'd be forced to hibernate or else he would be so frustrated he'd give up and go searching for easier prey.

I didn't know that an olfway never gives up and is very thorough. He spent days digging around my base and uncovered a place where I'd been careless in sheathing. All three elements of the shell could be detected. I knew the weak spot existed, but I hadn't thought he'd go that deep.

AWAY went the killer to pupate. When summer came, he crawled out of his hole. Before attacking me, however, he ate up my crops, upset my cage-shells and devoured the mobiles therein, dug up my tendrils and ate them, and broke off my waterpipe.

But when he picked all the apples off my tree and consumed them, my nerves tingled. The summer before I had transported, via my network of underground tendrils, an amount of a certain poison-

ous mineral to the tree. In so doing I killed the tendrils that did the work, but I succeeded in feeding to the roots minute amounts of the stuff—selenium, Father termed it, I think. I grew more tendrils and carried more poison to the tree. Eventually, the plant was full of the potion, yet I had fed it so slowly that it had built up a kind of immunity. A kind of, I say, because it was actually a rather sickly tree.

I must admit I got the idea from one of Father's not-so stories, tapped out in Orsemay so Mother wouldn't be vexed. It was about a mobile—a female, Father claimed, though I find the concept of a female mobile too nervequivering to dwell on—a mobile who was put into a long sleep by a poisoned apple.

The olfway seemed not to have heard of the story. All he did was retch. After he had recovered, he crawled up and perched on top of my dome. He broke off my big pulse-stalk and inserted his ovipositor in the hole and began dripping acid.

I was frightened, true, for as you all know, there is nothing more panic-striking than being deprived of pulsing and not knowing at all what is going on in the world outside your shell. But, at the same time, his actions were what I had expected and planned on. So I tried to suppress my nervequiverings. After all, I knew the olfway would work on that spot. It was for that very reason that I had shifted my brain to one side and jacked up my oversize stomach closer to the top of my dome.

My sisters had scoffed because I'd taken so much trouble with my organs. They'd been satisfied with the normal procedure of growing into Mother-size. While I was still waiting for the water pumped up from the stream to fill my sac, my sisters had long before heated theirs and were eating nice warm stew. Meanwhile, I was consuming much fruit and uncooked meat, which sometimes made me sick. However, the rejected stuff was good for the crops, so I didn't altogether suffer a loss.

As you know, once the stomach is full of water and well walled up, our body heat warms the fluid. As there is no leakage of heat except when we iris meat and vegetables in or out, the water comes to the boiling point.

Well, to pulse on with the story, when the mobile had scaled away the bone and copper and iron with his acids and made a hole large enough for his body, he dropped in for dinner.

I suppose he anticipated the usual helpless Mother or virgin, nerves numbed and waiting to be eaten.

If he did, his own nerves must have quivered. There was an iris on the upper part of my stomach, and it had been grown with the dimensions of a certain carnivorous mobile in mind.

But there was a period when I thought I hadn't fashioned the opening large enough. I had him half through, but I couldn't get his hindquarters past the lips. He was wedged in tight and clawing my flesh away in great gobbets. I was in such pain I shook my body back and forth and, I believe, actually rocked my shell on its base. Yet, despite my jerking nerves, I strained and struggled and gulped hard, oh, so hard. And, finally, just when I was on the verge of vomiting him back up the hole through which he had come, which would have been the end of me, I gave a tremendous convulsive gulp and popped him in.

My iris closed. Nor, much as he bit

and poured out searing acids, would I open it again. I was determined that I was going to keep this meat in my stew, the biggest piece any Mother had ever had.

Oh, he fought. But not for long. The boiling water pushed into his open mouth and drenched his breathing-sacs. He couldn't take a sample of that hot fluid and then crawl off to pupate around it.

He was through—and he was delicious.

Yes, I know that I am to be congratulated and that this information for dealing with the monster must be broadcast to every one of us everywhere. But don't forget to pulse that a mobile was partly responsible for the victory over our ancient enemy. It may quiver your nerves to admit it, but he was.

Where did I get the idea of putting my stew-sac just below the hole the olfway always makes in the top of our shells? Well, it was like so many I had. It came from one of Father's not-so stories, told in Orsemay. I'll pulse it sometime when I'm not so busy. After you, dearie, have learned our secret language.

I'll start your lessons now. First. . . .

What's that? You're quivering with curiosity? Oh, very well, I'll give you some idea of the not-so story, then I'll continue my lessons with this neophyte.

It's about eethay olfway and eethay eethray ittlelay igspay.

Featured in Our Next Issue

THE WINDS SHINE AT NIGHT

A Brilliant Novel by SAM MERWIN, JR.

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LEGACY

An Interplanetary Novelet by ROGER DEE

AND MANY OTHER STORIES AND FEATURES!

The Stars Are Closer Than You Think

By R. S. RICHARDSON

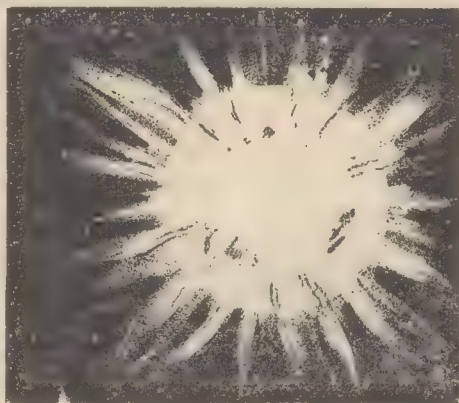
A prominent astronomer looks at our celestial neighbors

THE term "astronomical" has come to mean any enormous magnitude, whether it refers to the distances of the extra-galactic nebulae or the national debt. Similarly, astronomers are supposed to have developed such a tolerance to huge figures that they can toss off light-years and parsecs in the same casual way that other people speak of feet and yards.

Now it has always seemed to me that there has been altogether too much emphasis laid upon the separations of the heavenly bodies. It is true that no amount of persuasion can ever make the distance to Alpha Centauri of 25,000 billion miles anything but an abstract number, although I understand that spaceships think nothing of embarking upon such a voyage these days. But not all the heavenly bodies are separated by distances of this magnitude. Many of them are at distances quite easy for us to comprehend. Second, a large percentage shows a marked tendency to associate in pairs, groups, and clusters. Let us therefore reverse the usual procedure and look at astronomy from the view-

point of how closely the various heavenly bodies are grouped together rather than how far they are spread apart.

The nearest familiar object in the sky is the moon. The moon is 2163 miles in diameter and on the average 238,860 miles away. Every month we can see for ourselves exactly how a body of this size looks at this distance. The moon may approach as close as 221,460 miles — a distance an airliner could easily cover in a month. No other



planet can boast of so large a satellite so nearby. Seen from outer space our system must resemble twin worlds.

The nearest any planet comes to the Earth is Venus when it makes one of its rare transits across the sun's disk in December. At the transit of December 6, 1882, Venus was 24,568,000 miles away, which is about 1.5 million miles less than the minimum figure you will find generally quoted in the text-books. Seen through a telescope a few weeks before closest approach Venus bears a striking resemblance to the crescent moon. Indeed, it is often hard to get many people to believe it is not the

crescent moon. Under a magnification of 500, which is about the highest that can be used to advantage on this difficult planet, Venus is brought within an optical distance of 50,000 miles and looks seven times larger than the full moon does to the naked eye.

Mars is the only other planet that ever comes within a distance comparable to Venus. These close approaches always occur in August and September at intervals of 15 and 17 years. The closest approach in our time came in August, 1924, when the Red Planet was only 34,637,000 miles away. The next closest approach will be on Sept. 11, 1956, when the distance will be 35,400,000 miles.

The closest approach possible would be for Mars to pass by when it is nearest the sun and when the Earth is farthest from the sun. At present the two orbits are turned so that this is impossible, but the orbits are slowly shifting around in space so that the time of the closest possible approach can be determined. Calculations show that the last one occurred 47,600 years ago and that there will be another in 278,200 A.D. This absolute minimum distance of Mars is 33,883,000 miles. Of course, by that time we will be making regular trips to Mars so that our ancestors will not see much advantage in this beneficent conjunction.

The closest approach of any comet occurred on July 1, 1770, when Lexell's Comet was at a distance of 1,400,000 miles. When discovered on June 14 by Messier it was described as a moderately bright object with a starlike nucleus, but only two weeks later its head had swollen to more than five times the diameter of the moon. No comet before or since has ever loomed so large. Despite the fact that it was visible for four months and that elaborate calculations were made upon its orbit, Lexell's comet was never seen again, although search was continued as late as 1852.

Jupiter has had close brushes with several comets. A collision almost occurred on July 20, 1886, when Brooks'

Comet passed inside the orbit of the fifth satellite and missed the surface by a mere 55,000 miles. As a punishment for such unseemly conduct, Jupiter reduced the comet's period by 22 years.

Although several asteroids are known that pass within a few million miles of the Earth, the record is still held by Hermes, which on October 30, 1937, missed the Earth by a mere 485,000 miles. Its orbit is so uncertain, however, that this distance might have been as little as 220,000 miles which puts it closer than the moon.

Half a dozen satellites revolve at distances from their primaries which seem very moderate compared with other figures we see in the papers everyday. Phobos is only 3,700 miles above Mars or about the distance from Panama to Honolulu. The fifth satellite of Jupiter is 68,300 miles from the Jovian surface. And Mimas, the seventh satellite of Saturn, is 76,000 miles from the planet's surface and skirts along the edge of the ring system at a distance of 27,000 miles.

Passing out of the solar system into interstellar space we find distances expanding so tremendously that the prospect of close encounters among the stars seem ridiculous. Yet it is a fact that many stars are closer together than the planets in our little family. For example, the separations of more than two dozen so-called eclipsing binaries are known, which range from ten million miles down to actual contact.

The largest aggregations of stars are the extra-galactic nebulae. Although these objects appear to be flying apart on a grand scale they also exhibit distinct clustering tendencies. For here again we find double, triple and multiple galaxies on up to the clusters of universes such as those in Virgo and Coma Berenices. And finally, whether these island universes themselves are merely parts of higher systems, or whether they belong to one all inclusive super-system, is one of the problems that cosmologists have yet to solve. ● ● ●

JIGSAW

By TOM McMORROW, JR.



ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Spaceport Chicago, February 26, 2168. . . DEPARTING—Spaceliner American Beauty, Galactic Spaceways, for Mars. Scheduled to arrive Spaceport New Dallas May 14. Eighty-seven passengers. Captain Anthony Kostov in Command.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS BULLETIN

THE SPACELINER AMERICAN BEAUTY CRASHED IN FLAMES TODAY ON THE LANDING FIELD AT NEW DALLAS, MARS. OFFICIALS OF GALACTIC SPACEWAYS STATED THAT LOSS OF LIFE WAS QUOTE LIMITED UNQUOTE. NO FURTHER DETAILS IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE.

TRANSCRIPT

May 27, 2168—The following conversation between the spaceliner American Beauty and GCA, Spaceport New Dallas, Mars. was recorded 5/14/2168 and played at the official inquiry today:

KOSTOV: Calling GCA. This is Kostov in American Beauty calling GCA New Dallas. Do you read me? Come in, GCA. Over.

GCA : GCA to American Beauty. Your're in the screen. Come in. All clear for landing. Over.

KOSTOV: Check. Coming in. Speed now ten thousand. Over.

GCA : You are now visible in northern sky. Will have drink ready. Over.

KOSTOV: That you, Ralph?

GCA : Yeah, Tony. Welcome back. Will you have that with soda or on the rocks?

KOSTOV: Straight, with a blonde chaser, if you don't mind. You say you can see me?

GCA : Like Sirius on a clear night. Only one problem.

KOSTOV: What's that?

GCA : You're smack in between me and that girl in Omaha. I wish you wouldn't block the view like that.

KOSTOV: I'll take my hat off. Better?

GCA : Much. Say, what's that light on your starboard side?

KOSTOV: Light? There shouldn't be any

(AN EXPLOSION, FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF ROARING FLAME)

GCA : Tony! What happened? GCA calling American Beauty!

JENSEN: Stewardess to pilot! Stewardess to pilot! The starboard fuel tank's exploded! Fire in passageway!

KOSTOV: Activate all extinguishers—clear the passengers forward—I'm going to close the emergency bulkheads.

GCA : My God, it's a ball of fire! Tony, can you make it?

KOSTOV: I can make anything. If it gets hot enough I'll spit on it and put it out—Pilot to naviga-

NOTE: At this point American Beauty's radio went out.

BOARD FINDING: Flippant attitude of ship-to-port conversation to be deplored. On the basis of this and other evidence, however, the official finding of this Board is No Negligence. Accident due solely to mechanical failure.

GALACTIC SPACEWAYS, INC.
Office of the Personnel Director

6/4/68

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL:

Interviewed employee A. Kostov relative to the unfortunate business of 5/14/68 in which thirty-six passengers and two crewmen lost their lives. Gave him the news that he is through as a pilot, due to the fact that we feel the experience has broken his nerve. Offered him a desk job, which he declined as expected. Accepted his resignation, effective immediately.

COMMENT: Entire incident most unfortunate. Understand that the Line might lose passengers to Interplanetary Transport Service

if the American Beauty pilot continued to operate our ships, but regret this loss of a valuable employee. Of course he will not be taken on by any other line, but the profession will be the poorer for the absence of this talented, fearless pilot. On the personal level, hope that this man of whom all associates were fond will not take out his understandable bitterness in any violent manner.—A. J. Bannerman, Director of Personnel

DEATH KNELL OF SPACESHIPS SEEN POSSIBLE

New York, Sept. 12—Speculation was rife in scientific circles this week over reports that a workable converter-transmitter may soon be a practical reality. Should this prove true the space ship, a travel fixture for two centuries, would soon be obsolete.

The principle of the converter-transmitter, long known to scientific enthusiasts, is that of television carried a step farther. As television converts voices and images into electrical impulses and beams them to a receiving set which reassembles the picture and voice which started out, solid objects are converted, transmitted and reassembled by this mechanism.

Clearly, workable converter-transmitters would quickly cause the spaceship to become outmoded, as they would transmit anything and everything at the speed of light. The moon could be reached in less than two seconds, Mars in four minutes.

The great question is whether humans could endure the stress of such an experience. The current speculation has been caused by rumors that a leading scientific foundation has secretly started human experimentation with a converter-transmitter.

YOUNG MAN WANTED to Take Part in Scientific Experiment. Must Be Healthy, Intelligent, Accustomed to Dangerous Work. Pay Is Generous. Write Box W2714, Chicago.

PEIFFER SCIENCE FOUNDATION

PROGRESS REPORT

PROJECT 3889, NICHOLAS GARSKI, DIRECTOR
12 SEPT., 2168

Concluded interviewing of volunteers. Believe the right man has been found. Name—Anthony Kostov. Claims to be a former space pilot. Feel that he is the perfect subject—age 28, physically and morally tough. Most important, however, he is obviously under a compulsion to prove his courage, due to some incident in his recent past. This compulsion should prove helpful in case he learns what happened to Sartorius—Garski.

REPORT

FROM : Council Member #7
TO : The Science Council
SUBJECT: Peiffer Converter-Transmitter

1. Verified rumor that Nicholas Garski, director of experiment, plans to use human subject again, despite Council ruling after the Sartorius incident. He admits this intention, defies Council to stop him.

2. Ruled that all activity in connection with this experiment be halted pending investigation and ruling of the full Council.

3. Strongly urge that:

- a. Garski be permanently restrained from further experimentation with the converter-transmitter, as he has proved himself irresponsibly reckless.
- b. The machine be impounded, since neither the Foundation nor its agent Garski have exhibited restraint in their handling of this tremendous force or respect for the edicts of this Council.
- c. That Anthony Kostov, the proposed human subject, be acquainted with the facts in the case of Steven Sartorius.

MEMORANDUM

FROM: The Science Council

TO : Anthony Kostov, c/o Peiffer Science Foundation

The attached medical record is forwarded for your attention.

(Signed) Robert Shepard, President

STATE NEURO-PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL
EVANSTON, ILL.

Case History 8739

Name__Sartorius, Steven

Date of Admission__Dec. 18, 2166

Age at Date of Admission__25

Patient was employed by Peiffer Science Foundation as electronic engineer for six years, following graduation summa cum laude from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Worked under Dr. Nicholas Garski on the Peiffer converter-transmitter for the three years immediately prior to his mental collapse. No evidence of psychiatric disturbance during these years, in college or in childhood.

On Dec. 15, 2166, Sartorius placed himself in the converter-transmitter and acted as a human guinea pig in an experiment. Appeared dazed but unhurt after the experience and was placed in bed. Arose late at night, however, and returned to the laboratory.

Questioned by a night watchman, he attacked and strangled the man. In the morning he was found, in excellent spirits, working on the machine. At his feet was the dead body of the watchman.

Patient cannot be classified as paranoic, as there are no persecution delusions, nor does he exhibit symptoms of hebephrenia or catatonia. Is cool, lucid at all times, but totally unable to distinguish right from wrong. Inclines toward capricious violent outbursts of the most vicious sort, as above.

Diagnosis: Insane, Unclassified. Dangerous.

Prognosis: Incurable.

PEIFFER SCIENCE FOUNDATION

PROGRESS REPORT

PROJECT 3889, NICHOLAS GARSKI, DIRECTOR

27 SEPT., 2168

Those bumbling amateurs on the Science Council are throwing every possible roadblock in my path. But they will not stop me. A Council member inspected the laboratory last week, ordered me to suspend all operations, even took care that the complete medical dossier on Sartorius was sent to my volunteer. When the volunteer showed it to me I freely admitted the accuracy of the record. Told him that if he were afraid, he could withdraw and I would understand. This brought him quickly into line. My theory as to his compulsion was evidently well-founded. As to the suspension of operations, I shall see to it that it is strictly temporary.____Garski

Mr. Robert Shepard

Personal

It is regrettable that your organization has seen fit to interfere with my work. If it comes to the hearing before the full Council, I suppose I shall be forced to bring out the facts about some unfortunate medical experiments at the University forty-two years ago. Of course this might not bother the august President of the Council. Perhaps he likes to be reminded of carefree student days. . . .

G.

DIRECTIVE

FROM: THE PRESIDENT OF THE SCIENCE COUNCIL

TO : All Members

29 SEPT., 2168

SUSPENSION OF OPERATIONS ON PROJECT 3889, PEIFFER SCIENCE FOUNDATION, IS REVOKED EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY AND EXPERIMENTATION WILL BE PERMITTED TO PROCEED UNHINDERED. SHEPARD, PRESIDENT.

Mr. Ralph Watson

Ground Control Approach Division

Spaceport New Dallas, Mars

Dear Ralph:

I may be seeing you sooner than you expect. Maybe you've read the rumors about converter-transmitter experiments in the facsimile papers. Well, that's me, baby. I'm the human cannonball that they're going to shoot through space.

You've heard of the Peiffer Foundation. They turned out that stepped-up atomic fuel a couple of years ago. Well, They're my new bosses, and an old bird by the name of Garski is getting ready to load me into his cannon. And the target is Mars.

So if you hear somebody go shooting by your window one of these nights, hollering, "Look, Ma—no rocket ship!" that'll be your old buddy.

I'm not exactly crazy about this Garski character—he looks at you like you were an interesting smear under a microscope—but I'm not getting paid to love him. I'm getting paid to take a chance, and the money's good—enough to buy me a tramp ship so I can start my own little line when this is over.

And speaking of lines, tell our friend Bannerman I'll be glad to hold him on my lap on the return trip—that is, if he's got the nerve.

See you soon, buddy.

Tony

PEIFFER SCIENCE FOUNDATION
PROGRESS REPORT
PROJECT 3889, NICHOLAS GARSKI, DIRECTOR
4 OCT., 2168

All is in readiness for the final step in the experiment. The volunteer has signed a waiver of all claims save that of payment, the mechanism has been triple-checked in test runs with inanimate solids. Tomorrow at approximately 2:30 p.m. Central Standard Time the Earth will come into the ideal juxtaposition with Mars. I am confident that the adjustments I have made in the resistor coils and elsewhere will eliminate all shock to the subject and success will be mine. But twenty-four hours now and a galaxy will echo to the name of—Garski

PEIFFER SCIENCE FOUNDATION
FINAL REPORT
PROJECT 3889, NICHOLAS GARSKI, DIRECTOR
5 OCT., 2168

(Note: This report made by Laboratory Technician D. J. Williams in the absence of Dr. Garski, for the record. Complete report will be made by the Doctor upon his return.)

Project 3889 was today completed. Result: Failure. The subject Kostov has been found insane and removed under guard. Dr. Garski left the laboratory in a highly agitated state immediately after the experiment and has not returned. It might be observed by one who was present at both experiments that the eyes of the subject Kostov were of the same lifeless glassiness as those of Sartorius after the first experiment in '66.

UNIDENTIFIED BODY DISCOVERED

Chicago, Oct. 6—The body of an elderly man was found floating in Lake Michigan this morning by fishermen. There was no identification on the body, but the clothing seemed to indicate a hospital or laboratory worker. Suicide was indicated by an unsigned note in a pocket reading, "I know now what I have done and it is unthinkable."

The Journal of Steven Sartorius

Oct. 6, 2168 . . . There is another nearby like myself. I can feel its presence. This is great news—the time approaches! Soon

I will no longer have to while away the hours by writing these pages and then destroying them before the guards come around. For this other must sense my presence too, and working together, we will quickly escape this house of madness.

They have put it in the compartment next to mine. That is excellent. I will communicate with it by wall-taps, and we will soon devise a code. Once this is done, I will communicate to it my plan for overpowering the night guard and we will be away from this place.

Away—free—free of these fools who class us with lunatics. And of them all, Garski was the greatest fool. I hear the guards in the hall saying he destroyed himself when the second experiment failed.

Failed, he thought! A fool to the end. It succeeded! Just as the first one did, it succeeded.

An answer so beautifully simple, and he never saw it. Garski the perfectionist, meticulously checking each last detail. And not seeing the most important fact of all.

Of course the machine works—up to a point. The body that is assembled in the receiving set is physically complete. Atoms and molecules can be converted into electrical impulses and beamed through space, for atoms and molecules are solids. But a soul is not.

There is more to a man than atoms and molecules, and that is why I am not a man, although I have a man's body. Thanks to Garski's machine, I am the first of all time to be free of that foul encumbrance men call a soul. The chains of conscience struck off, I am free to destroy those who oppose me, to kill—to conquer!

Yes—conquer. For there will be more of us when we have escaped this prison. I know how to build the machine. And I hear the guards saying this other is strong and bold. That is well. What a combination we will make, I to create the supermen of tomorrow and my new brother to lead them! A terrible army of soulless creatures to enslave these weaklings that call themselves men.

Wait! Do I hear a faint tapping? Yes, it is trying to contact me already. I come, brother, I come. . . !

STATE NEURO-PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL
Evanston, Illinois
Nov. 7, 2168
To All Staff Members—CONFIDENTIAL

The escape of the inmates Sartorius and Kostov will not be discussed with members of the press. The salient facts, i. e. vital statistics on the dead guard Rasmussen, exact time of the escape, etc., have already been announced by this office and it is felt that further discussion of the matter would only lead to unnecessary speculation.

LOUIS ASHLEY, Administrator.
Crashaw, Ky.

August 22, 2170

Deer Bessy,

How you ben? i am fine hope to see you soon. Caint see you nex Sardy nigt tho. am gon up with a bunch of the boys to see them funny fellows Tony an Steve. They got som graet tricks you kno. Best ones a big black box wher one sets in it and tother pushes a swich an he disappears. Aint nowhers about—you can hunt all you plees. Then all at wonce hes back alaffin like all get out.

Corse they ack kinda crazy but there a barel of fun. Next Sardy nigt they say there gon let me an the boys set in the box. So when i see you i will let you kno how it feels to disappear. Hope i dont lose nothin in the prosess if you kno what i mean. Ha. ha.

Rufe



Time Traveler

He found an old and long-deserted road
That tapered off into the brooding skies,
And up that dusty boulevard he strode
While haunted winds awoke a thousand sighs.
The far horizon had a death's-head grey,
As if to show the road would end at last
In much the slow, annihilating way
In which the centuries had whispered past.

But never did he hear an echo stir,
Or find a single bird upon the wing,
Or track or trace from which he might infer
That dying world contained a living thing—

And yet he swore he heard the ghostly wheels
Of at least a million automobiles . . .

—A. Kulik

The Agile Algolian

I

MANNING DRACO had been out of the hospital for the better part of two weeks, but the Medical Monopoly had kept him hanging around on Rigil Kentaurus while the pharmaceutical pundits scratched their heads and muttered the mystical phrases of their profession. If it hadn't been for a generous supply of nurses, who were interested in a quite different branch of research, Manning might well have fused his jets in frustration.



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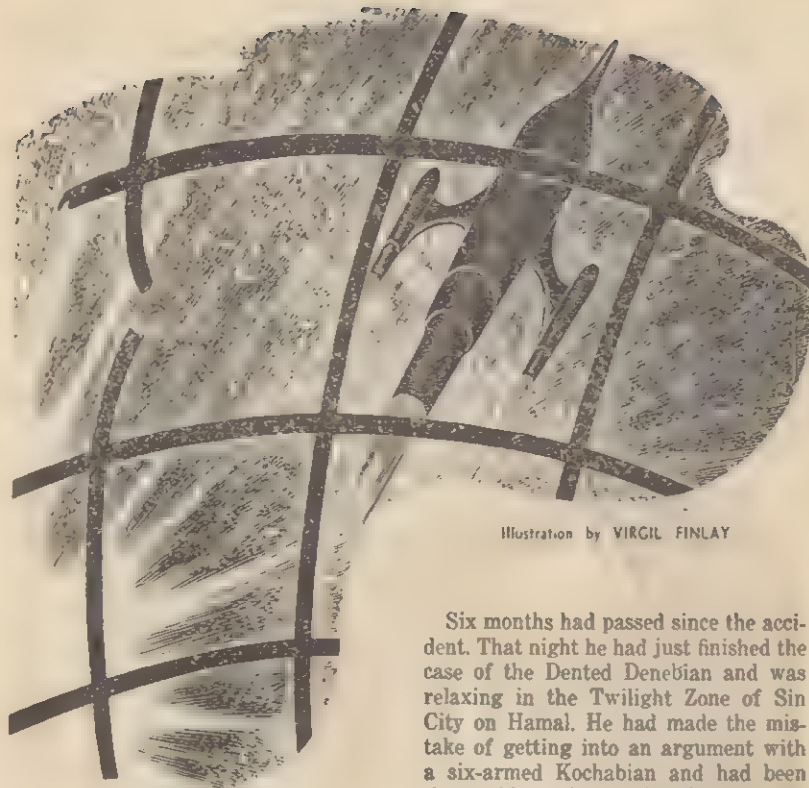


Illustration by VIRGIL FINLAY

Six months had passed since the accident. That night he had just finished the case of the Dented Denebian and was relaxing in the Twilight Zone of Sin City on Hamal. He had made the mistake of getting into an argument with a six-armed Kochabian and had been thoroughly and scientifically trounced. He had come to a week later in the hospital. Diagnosis: various severe bruises, six broken ribs, one broken leg, and concussion.

He had, however, healed nicely and a month before his release had progressed to the point where he could chase, and catch, the fleetest nurses. His release was only a formality until he came to the cybernetic mind-reading required of all head-injury patients before they were permitted to return to work. He had gone through many a cybernetic M-R, but this time something went wrong. The machine blew a fuse. When it was repaired, they tried again. The

Author's Note

There have been so many letters* asking how Manning Draco got started and how he developed a secondary mind shield (the only one among the Terrans) that I have decided to take you back in time—back to the year 3470, when Manning Draco was unaware that he had any abilities other than the talents of an ordinary insurance investigator and a first-class ogler of shapely girls. —K. F. C.

*Well, there was one letter.

a novel by **KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN**

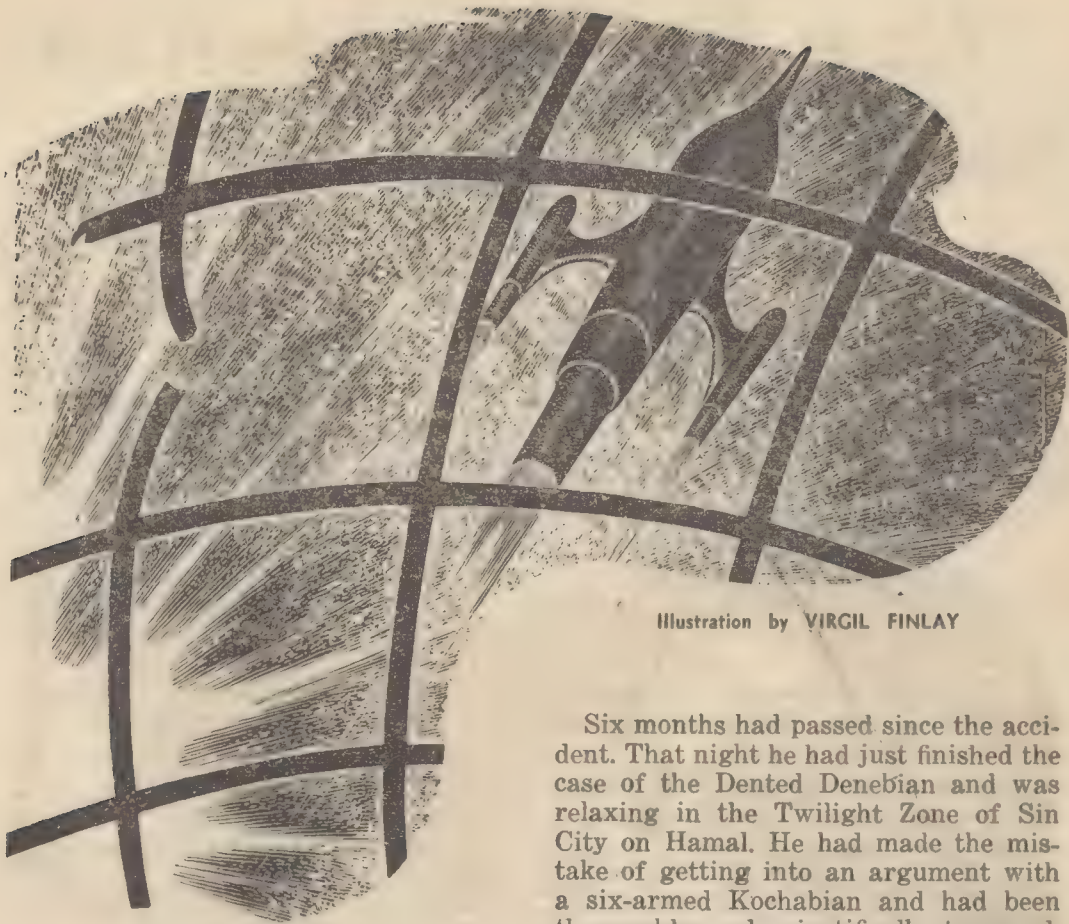


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Six months had passed since the accident. That night he had just finished the case of the Dented Denebian and was relaxing in the Twilight Zone of Sin City on Hamal. He had made the mistake of getting into an argument with a six-armed Kochabian and had been thoroughly and scientifically trounced. He had come to a week later in the hospital. Diagnosis: various severe bruises, six broken ribs, one broken leg, and concussion.

He had, however, healed nicely and a month before his release had progressed to the point where he could chase, and catch, the fleetest nurses. His release was only a formality until he came to the cybernetic mind-reading required of all head-injury patients before they were permitted to return to work. He had gone through many a cybernetic M-R, but this time something went wrong. The machine blew a fuse. When it was repaired, they tried again. The

a novel by **KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN**

reading revealed that there was only one thought in Manning Draco's head, a performance considerably below par for the average moron. And that one thought caused the doctors—all elderly gentlemen who had long ago given up fleshly pursuits—to blush.

The findings of the machine, which had not been wrong in five centuries, might have given pause to a more serious-minded young man, but Manning took it in his stride. He was quite willing to admit that he had only one thought at the moment and wanted no more. He was even annoyed at the doctors who kept pulling him away from that one thought in order to try to find out why he was so single-minded.

They had about decided that in some freak way a large slice of skull bone had been driven into his brain, shielding a large portion of it, when the whole matter was taken out of their hands. Otherwise they might have gone on carving up Manning until there was nothing left to withstand their skill.

The interference came, as it always does in such cases, from above. Prior to his accident, Manning Draco had been chief investigator for the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated, presided over by J. Barnaby Cruikshank. In absence of any proof that the accident had occurred on his own time, he had remained on salary while in the hospital. All of this had been well enough while the regular investigators had been able to handle the cases that came up. But then there came a case, cutting painfully into J. Barnaby's bank account, which he knew was beyond their abilities. The President of Greater Solarian set up a shout for his chief investigator.

It was practically impossible to ignore adverse reports from a cybernetic M-R, but to J. Barnaby Cruikshank the impossible was simply an impudent affront. He put in a visicall to the President of the Federation and quickly reduced that gentleman to the psychological state of an office boy. When he

finally broke the connection, the President merely passed along the same treatment to his Secretary of Internal Affairs. And so the hot, angry words of J. Barnaby were passed down along the line until finally an underling screamed the insults at the chief doctor of the Rigil Kentaurus Hospital.

Ten minutes later Manning Draco was discharged and the offending cybernetic report had vanished from the records.

WITHIN a matter of two hours, Manning strode cheerfully into the main offices of Greater Solarian in Nyork. He grinned down at the receptionist, but her answering expression was one of relief rather than the welcome he'd expected.

"Go on in," she said wearily. "He's been calling me every five minutes to ask if you've arrived."

"Tell him to simmer down," Manning said and passed on through the offices.

Outside the private office of the president, he hesitated until the door-scanner recognized him and the door swung open. He stepped inside and faced his employer.

At a mere thirty-eight, J. Barnaby Cruikshank had been the president and chief stockholder of a company that held a galactic-wide monopoly. It was true that he had inherited the company, but until his accession it had been a small outfit, insuring only humans. Under J. Barnaby, Greater Solarian had started issuing policies to cover every form of life in the galaxy. It had prospered and J. Barnaby was one of the richest and most influential men in the Federation.

J. Barnaby was a man of great urbanity, but it had already worn thin at the edges. His hair was mussed and his plastic sport coat ("Guaranteed not to wrinkle") was wrinkled.

"It's about time," he growled at the sight of his employee. "What did you do—walk back?"

Manning grinned as he dropped into

a chair. "Some welcome," he said.

"Welcome!" said J. Barnaby, looking at the ceiling for moral support. "You've just had a six months vacation at my expense in the finest hospital."

"With hot and cold running nurses," added Manning. "But don't forget I was grievously wounded while conducting certain investigations." He carefully neglected to make it clear that the inquiry had been into the morals of a Ganymedean dancing girl rather than an insurance problem.

C RUIKSHANK dropped his interest in Manning's health with alacrity. "Well," he said, "during the past year we've been taking quite a beating on joint life policies. There have been seventy-two thousand, one hundred and ten cases of husbands and wives taking out joint policies and then of one of the couple dying within a matter of days."

"The dangers of matrimony," Manning said. "All of the policies sold by the same man?"

"The same two. Sam Warren and

DRACO IN FLASHBACK . . .

SOME characters never grow old. The exploits of the imitable Manning Draco might have continued with no thought to the passage of years, like the Katzenjammer Kid who never grows an inch or a year. But for those who have wondered whether matrimony would cramp Draco's style, the author has gone back to an earlier time when Draco might have placed skirt-chasing rather higher on his list of essentials and when inhibitions were fewer. Considering what he went through, even he might welcome the protection of a wife.

—The Editor

"I have my suspicions about that," J. Barnaby said darkly. With what must have been an inner struggle, he smoothed the anger from his face and replaced it with what he fondly imagined was a friendly smile. "Of course, we're glad to have you back, Manning, my boy. The thoughts of all of us here at Greater Solarian were with you during your months of pain and—"

"Don't overdo it," Manning said. "A little bit of your sympathy goes a long way. Now, what's the crisis?"

"Well, there is a small matter," J. Barnaby admitted. He paused, as if in doubt. "You sure you feel up to a little work?"

"If I didn't, you'd prop me up on crutches and send me out anyway. What is it?"

Jaba Woo, an Algolian. They've been working together for some time and both have excellent records. I'd hate to think they were involved."

"Any other suspects?"

"A couple," J. Barnaby said. "All of the cases have taken place within a radius of two lightyears of Canopus. Warren and Woo have their headquarters on Canopus One. Unfortunately, the similarity between all these cases did not come to our attention until about a month ago. We've done some preliminary checking. In each case, the official records show that the deceased husband or wife died from natural or accidental causes, but in no case was there an autopsy. And in each case, there was a quick funeral, all handled by the same undertaker."

Manning looked his question.

"A Canopusian outfit," said J. Barnaby, "called the Happy Asteroid Mortuary. It's run by someone named Encycla Grave. He's probably an Algolian."

"Asteroid mortuary?"

"Yeah," J. Barnaby grunted. "He specializes in fancy funerals. Each one of the insured was buried on a small asteroid which was then power-driven into space. That's why we haven't been able to get an autopsy on a single one of them. Incidentally, in each case, the cost of the funeral was exactly one-half the amount of the insurance policy."

"Clever," Manning said. "Is that all you've got on him?"

"Not quite. We've had one bit of luck. Last week the patrol was over near Betelgeuse searching for smugglers. They stopped to investigate a stray asteroid. It was one of the asteroid-crypts. When they saw what was on it, they threw a magnetic-plate on it and brought it in. I got the report yesterday. A Mrs. Henry Orbson, Terran, was buried on it. She died about six months ago while she and her husband were spending their vacation on Canopus. A week before she died, she and her husband had taken out joint policies. Her husband collected two hundred thousand credits from us. The death certificate had stated that Mrs. Orbson died from a heart attack. Well, the heart attack was brought on by a sharp knife being drawn across her throat."

"Who signed the death certificate?"

"Encycla Grave," J. Barnaby said sourly. "He belongs to the Medical Monopoly as well as being a mortician."

"A nice racket," Manning said. "How come you haven't had him arrested?"

"There's more to it than this," said J. Barnaby. "As I said, the funerals are quick. The lady was buried in the dress she was wearing and in the pocket of it there was a letter—addressed to her husband. Here it is." He fished among the papers on his desk and came up with a letter. He handed it to Manning.

THE MARITAL RELATIONS BUREAU
27 Circle Square (Upper)
City of Sentiment
Canopus (I)

March 42, 3470
(Solarian date)

Mr. Henry Orbson,
Galactic Rest Hotel,
City of Sentiment,
Dear Sir:

At first guess, you might say that you have no marital problems. But are you happy? Or have you reached a time when the vows that bind you "until death do us part" are beginning to chafe? Does your wife nag and scold? Has she lost her beauty? Is there a younger woman in your future?

These are all questions which the man of intelligence must ask himself from time to time. If you are able to answer most of them in the negative, then you are a fortunate man and I congratulate you. If the answers are yes, I can do better than congratulate you. I can set you free.

There is *no charge* for a consultation. (In fact, you may *make a profit* out of the matter.) I guarantee satisfaction and there is no charge until after I have succeeded in eliminating the obstacle to your happiness. Even then the fee is modest.

Why not see me at your convenience?

Sincerely yours,
Nottyl Nadyl

"Who is this Nadyl?" Manning asked when he'd finished reading the letter.

"Another Algolian*, I think," J. Barnaby said. "You see how the letter implies that Nadyl will get rid of the guy's wife, without being evidence against him? There's no proof that Orbson went to see Nadyl, but two days after the date of this letter he bought the insurance policies. And one week later his wife died. And she was murdered."

"I gather that you think there's an Algolian in the moneypile," Manning said drily. "Or, rather, three of them. An Algolian undertaker, an Algolian heart-throb character, an Algolian insurance salesman, and Sam Warren. Is that all of them?"

*At that time, very little was known about Algolians. There were several of them doing business throughout the galaxy, but under the treaty of 3106 Terrans were forbidden to visit Algol for any purpose. All the Algolians who had been seen were completely different from one another in appearance and it was assumed that there were dozens, if not hundreds, of different species of Algol, all of them intelligent. Consequently, it was difficult to be sure who was an Algolian unless you were able to see his identity papers.

"I don't think so. All the asteroid-crypts were bought from the same place. There's a Rigelian named Dzanku Dzanku—calls himself Dizzy Dzanku, the Honest Rigelian—who's a second-hand asteroid dealer. He bought up several hundred used asteroids from the Mining Monopoly and has them in a close-formation orbit around Canopus, about five hundred miles from the surface. He does a fair vacation rental business, but he also supplies them to this Nadyl character."

"You got anything tying him in with the scheme?" Manning asked.

"No," J. Barnaby grunted. "But if he's an honest Rigelian, then he's the only one in the universe. You know that Rigel has a criminal culture, so you can bet if there's something crooked going on, this Dizzy Dzanku's in on it."

"Okay," Manning said. He stood up. "I'll go take a look."

"Not so fast," J. Barnaby said. "I've got the whole thing planned out. The way it is we could have this Henry Orbson and the undertaker arrested and make it stick. But that wouldn't break up the whole ring. We're going to set a trap for them."

MANNING scowled. "We?" he asked with heavy irony. "Whenever you start talking about what *we* are going to do, I get a cold wind on the back of my neck."

"Nonsense, my boy," J. Barnaby said briskly. "I have every confidence in you. Now, here's the setup. Instead of going there as Manning Draco, insurance investigator, you'll—what is your middle name again?"

"Melvin," Manning said reluctantly.

"Splendid. You're going to Canopus as Melvin Draco, a timed young business man on vacation. Rent one of the asteroids so you'll be away from it all. I've arranged for someone to go along and pose as your wife and all you have to do is wait until—"

"Wait a minute," Manning said. "If your idea is to send some old hag along

with me and then expect me to wait around while she hires some guy to cut my throat, you can get yourself another boy."

The visiscreen industry lost a great actor when J. Barnaby Cruikshank became a magnate. He could whip up a few tears and a reproachful expression at the drop of an accusation. "You wrong me, my dear boy," he said sadly. "I wouldn't think of putting your life in jeopardy. As I was about to say, it will appear that your wife is a nag and that you are heartily sick of her. Then all you do is wait to be contacted—probably by this marital relations individual—and make a deal for him to kill your wife after you've taken out insurance on her life. How does that sound?"

"Two objections. First, I still don't like the idea of being cooped up with some old crow you picked out. Second—what if something slips up and she is killed?"

"We will take up the old crow aspect in a moment," said J. Barnaby. "As to the second objection, she is an Aliothan. They are rather difficult to kill by ordinary methods. I trust that the matter will be concluded before the assassin discovers she is from Alioth."

Manning tried to conjure up a picture of an Aliothan, but he couldn't remember ever having seen one. "What do Aliothans look like?" he asked suspiciously.

"Completely humanoid in appearance," J. Barnaby said cheerfully. "Also in most of their habits, I might add. You are ready to leave at once?"

"I suppose so," Manning said reluctantly.

"Good." J. Barnaby leaned forward and touched a key on the interoffice plate of his visiphone. "You may now send in Miss Sera," he said.

Manning Draco waited with some trepidation. He was well aware of J. Barnaby's attitude concerning his interest in comely wenches and he could hardly imagine that this was anything

but some female who would give him nightmares for months to come. In a way, he was right.

The door to the office opened.

"Manning," J. Barnaby said, "this is Fanya Sera—to be known hereafter as Mrs. Melvin Draco. Miss Sera, this is Manning Draco."

"How do you do," Fanya said demurely.

FOR several seconds, Manning could only gape. What stood in the doorway was nothing short of a vision. She looked exactly like a Terran woman—but one such as he had seldom seen. She was tall, only two or three inches shorter than he; and every inch of her was a dream in curving flesh. So far as he could see—and her dress did little to limit sight—everything that should have been there was there to the fullest degree and nothing was missing. Her hair was long and golden blonde. Her eyes were gray-blue, her lips a soft red, her features flawless.

"Hello," Manning finally managed weakly.

"I believe," J. Barnaby said with malice, "we were having some discussion about old crow. . ."

"That," Manning said quickly, "was merely the crow I intended eating . . . does Miss Sera know about our assignment?"

"She does."

"Far be it from me to discourage any part of this," Manning said, "but do you think anyone is going to look at her and believe that I want to get rid of her?"

"I think they will," J. Barnaby said. "Miss Sera, you might show Mr. Draco one of your lesser talents."

The girl nodded and there was a glint of humor in her eyes. "Melvin Draco," she said, "if you think you're going to drag me all the way out here and then just keep me cooped up on a silly old asteroid—well, I'm not going to stand for it!" Her voice had suddenly taken on a whine so jarring that Manning

found himself wishing she was dead.

"Turn it off," he said shuddering. "And promise me you'll use it only when necessary."

"I promise," she said. Her voice was soft and seductive again and she was smiling invitingly.

"You're right, J. Barnaby," Manning said. "When do we leave?"

"Right now. I've left orders for the cashier to give you enough money to cover expenses. Good luck, my boy."

"How can I miss?" Manning muttered, giving the blonde a meaningful glance as he held the door open for her.

II

IT WAS less than an hour later when Manning Draco's ship, the *Alpha Actuary*, blasted off from the main Nyork spaceport. As soon as he was clear of Terra's atmosphere, he fed the position of Canopus I into the automatic pilot and gave up the controls. It was 650 lightyears to Canopus—just far enough to be a pretty dull trip ordinarily, but Manning didn't expect it to be this time.

It could never be said that he was one to waste valuable time. He had barely put the ship on automatic control when he was showing the blonde the special features on the Alpha Actuary. She seemed to be properly impressed by the miniature computer, the audio-reader, the demagnetizer, the geoscope, the impulse-translator, and the robosmith. Manning used the latter to make her a pair of gold earrings.

"Thank you, Manning," she said. She gave him a half-veiled glance that seemed all promise. "I never knew Terrans were so nice."

"This is only the beginning, baby," Manning said. "Since we're soon going to start fooling the natives into thinking we're man and wife, don't you think we might get in a little practice first? You could start by showing your gratitude in a more tangible form."

She laughed, a soft musical sound that made Manning's skin feel prickly.

It hardly sounded as if he were being repulsed, so he stepped toward her.

He reached out with his arms and at the same time bent to meet her lips. It seemed to him that she swayed to meet him. Then, just before he touched her, something struck him; it jarred his whole body, tore at his nerves until they were ragged. He staggered away and the jarring stopped. His teeth still hurt, however, until he realized that his jaws were clenched.

"What in space was that?" he demanded.

The blonde smiled, but there was something close to disappointment in her eyes. It encouraged Manning to try again.

Once again he got within an inch of her, so close that he could feel the warmth from her skin and his senses were drunk with her perfume, before the giant invisible hand picked him up and shook him until his teeth rattled. It took all of his strength to pull away, but he succeeded just before he was about to black out. His head ached as he backed away.

"What—what happened?" he asked as soon as he could.

This time the blonde laughed. "I'm sorry," she said, and she seemed to be despite the laughter, "but you'll have to ask Mr. Cruikshank."

"J. Barnaby? What's he got to do with it?"

"I promised I wouldn't tell you." She hesitated, then went on: "Manning, I'm truly sorry—but it won't last forever."

For once in his life, Manning Draco was not to be consoled by the promise in a woman's eyes and voice. He retreated to the other end of the ship and sulked.

LATER, when Fanya Sera went into the small stateroom to sleep, an angry Manning Draco put in a visicall to Terra. He was even oblivious of the fact that it was probably well after J. Barnaby's bed time. A sleepy butler tried to convince him that the hour was

untimely, but failed. A few minutes later J. Barnaby, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, appeared on the screen.

"What are you up to?" Manning demanded.

If there had been any doubt that J. Barnaby Cruikshank was up to something, his appearance would have removed it. Normally, any interference with the slumber of the president of Greater Solarian would have resulted in an explosion of temper like a major planet-quake. Instead, however, he was staring out of the screen with the benign expression of an indulgent uncle.

"My dear boy," he said sweetly, "what are you talking about?"

"You know damn well what I'm talking about," Manning snapped. "This Fanya Sera. What did you do to her?"

"I am a happily married man," J. Barnaby said solemnly. "It never occurred to me to do anything to her."

"You know what I'm talking about. Every time I get within an inch of her, something starts shaking my teeth loose."

"Oh, that." J. Barnaby managed the impossible feat of a chuckle that was both fatherly and sinister. "As a matter of fact, she is equipped with a little device I insisted upon. If you were the father of a growing girl, as I am, you'd probably be more familiar with it. Known as the Parents' Comforter, it uses ultrasonic sound to fend off predatory males. I suppose you might call it an ultrasonic chastity belt. But you'll be perfectly safe as long as you keep your passes visual." The chuckle grew into a full-blown laugh.

"Very funny," snarled the man. "Why?"

"You might say I had three reasons, my boy. I wanted to be sure that you kept your mind on the business at hand, something I knew would be difficult once you caught sight of Miss Sera. Then you are supposed to give the picture of a man who wants to get rid of his wife and the Canopusians are famous for the habit of peeking through keyholes."

"And the third reason?" Manning prompted.

"Believe me, my boy, I also did it for your own protection," J. Barnaby said in his most fatherly manner. "I have an abiding concern for your welfare."

Manning told J. Barnaby what he could do with his paternal concern. Although humanity had progressed far by the 35th Century, there had been very little improvement in such suggestions and his words were almost the same as might have been spoken two thousand years earlier. The censor on Procyon covered her ears tightly. If one of the men hadn't been an important figure in the Federation, she would have jammed the call. As it was, she merely tried not to listen and hoped that no one else was tapping that frequency.

J. Barnaby laughed as he broke the connection. The ship's screen faded to a dull gray, leaving Manning more frustrated than before.

Sitting in the comfortable pilot-chair, Manning finally caught a few hours sleep, but it was far from restful and he awakened in pretty much the same mood.

When Fanya Sera rejoined him, he tried to maintain a dignified silence. But it was almost impossible to sulk in the presence of so much beauty. Finally, he got the idea of trying to talk her into removing the ultrasonic device—whatever it was. It was a lost cause. She was flattered by his eagerness, but that was all.

"I promised Mr. Crukshank I wouldn't remove it until we were finished with the case," she said. She gave him a lingering glance. "I didn't promise anything about what would happen when you've cleaned it up."

"Is that the best we can do?" Manning asked.

She smiled. "What's wrong, honey?" she asked. "Afraid it'll take you a long time to solve this?"

He gave her a hard look. "Baby," he said, "you're going to see speed that will make your head spin."

WITHIN an hour, they were entering the atmosphere of Canopus I. With the ship back on manual, Manning brought it down on instructions from the spacetower.

They stepped out of the ship to find it surrounded by Canopusians, eyes staring avidly and hearing-hairs quivering with eagerness.* Those nearest reached out with their tentacles and lightly touched the cloth of Manning's coat. There was something amusing about their boundless curiosity, although he also knew it could become tiresome. Terrans, visiting Canopus for the first time, could never get used to being followed by a crowd of Canopusians.

"Melvin," said Fanya, "why are those horrible little creatures staring at us?" She was using the special voice again and Manning shuddered.

"I don't know, my dear," he said, trying to keep in character. "But I'll—" He stopped and gaped. At the sound of Fanya's voice, the Canopusians' hearing hairs had all started agitating violently. Then they turned and scampered away across the spaceport. It was the first time Manning had ever known them to act in such a manner, but he didn't blame them.

After going through spaceport customs, Manning and Fanya got an aircab and directed the driver to take them to the Terran Place Hotel. A few minutes later they were flying over Canopusia, capital of the planet and one of the largest cities in the galaxy.

Canopusia was one of the wonders of the modern universe. Tourists came from all over the Federation merely to see the city about which they had heard so much. It had been described by one

*The origin of Canopusians is unknown and they seem to be unrelated to any other life form in the galaxy. Their bodies and heads are all of one piece, looking somewhat like inverted gourds. A Canopusian has two short, stubby legs. His tentacles, two of them, are located about midway on his body. On the head-part, there is a tiny, bud-like mouth. He has two eyes, similar in shape to those of humans, and a third one which is on the end of a thin, three-inch eye-stalk. This eye-stalk is flexible and is primarily used for peering around corners and into rooms—to most Terrans it is known as their "keyhole peeper." On the top of his head, the Canopusian has two circular rows of stiff hair. The outer row consists of hearing-hairs and the inner ones are olfactory in nature. The Canopusian is about three feet tall and his smooth flesh is pale lemon in color.

visiscreen commentator as a monument to the mentality of the natives. Canopusians, as has been noted, were inquisitive and incurable gossips; further, they had no recognizable system of logic. This was well illustrated by their major city. Streets ran in every which-way, a single street sometimes crossing itself seven or eight times. The name of a street would often change in the middle of a block. Other races who had spent a lifetime there still couldn't find their way around the city.* As a result the largest single profession on the planet was that of guide.

Almost the entire city had been built before other races had descended on Canopus and the buildings showed the same lack of concern. There were skyscrapers running up seventy and eighty stories in which there were no elevators or in which floors were constructed in such haphazard split-level design that you couldn't find a particular floor without a guide. Many buildings, residential and professional, stood empty because the builders had neglected to include any sort of entrance. All of this had produced two schools of thought; one convinced that Canopusians were pretty stupid and the other contending that they just didn't give a damn.

Canopusia was a thriving city, but almost all industry and commerce was carried on by other races. Similarly, the guides were all foreigners, although limited to those races with phenomenal memories.

ARRIVING at the hotel, Manning registered and they were escorted to a suite by a Canopusian bellboy, accompanied by an official guide. He could hardly wait until they were inside, and the bellboy and guide were gone, for Fanya had never stopped yakking at him in that shrill voice from the time they had left the spaceport. The shrewish whine finally trailed off as the door closed, leaving them alone.

"How am I doing?" she asked in her

normal voice.

It was such a relief that Manning, without thinking, swung a gentle slap at a rounded and attractive portion of her anatomy. It was a mistake for he in turn was slapped silly by ultrasonic waves.

He recovered, cursing J. Barnaby with heartfelt emotion. As he did so, he saw a Canopusian third eye retreating through the keyhole. He laughed in spite of himself.

"As much as I hate to admit it," he said "J. Barnaby did have a good idea. Canopusians being what they are, it won't be an hour before the entire city knows that Mrs. Draco wears some sort of contraption which klobbers her husband every time he tries to touch her and that Mrs. Draco also has a voice that sounds like an atomic saw trying to chew through asteroid ore, and never stops using it. That ought to bring the wife-killer on the run." He glanced at the blonde and couldn't see how anything so softly rounded could be practically indestructible. "Baby," he said, "are you sure that this isn't going to be dangerous for you?"

"Positive," she said. "But it's nice of you to worry." She blew him a kiss—which was about as satisfactory as such things always are. "What do we do now?"

"I shall admire you for a moment—from a distance," he added hastily. "It'll give time for the word to spread. Then I think I'll go see this second-hand asteroid dealer. Leaving you at home, I might add. There's going to be a limit to how much I can take of your public manners until this is over . . . want me to call room service and have something to eat sent up?"

She shook her head. "I don't need anything. My metabolism is quite different from yours."

"Meaning you don't eat?"

"Not as often as you Terrans, at least," she said. "I may be hungry in a few days—it all depends. . . ." Her voice trailed off without revealing on what it

*The Canopusians couldn't either, but they didn't care.

depended. But as he stared at the sensuous curves of her body, there was probably nothing which interested Manning less than her eating habits.

"That reminds me," he said. "Where have you been all my life? I've been around, but I don't think I ever saw an Aliothan before."

She had seated herself at the built-in vanity table and was combing her hair. It gleamed in the light like gold threads. "Probably not," she said. "Very few of us have ever been off our planet. This is my own first trip and it was only possible because Mr. Cruikshank arranged it."

"Why?"

She hesitated, then faced him with a funny little smile. "It's a kind of inequality of sexes," she said. "It's only the women of Alioth who are not allowed to leave the planet."

"All the men travel about in the galaxy?"

"Well—all the single men." She stood up and stretched seductively, her breasts straining against the wisp of silk. "But when an Aliothan man marries he never leaves his wife."

"That I can understand" Manning said fervently. "I can appreciate Aliothan men not wanting the competition they'd have if the rest of the universe knew about you. Have they always penned you in like that?"

SHE shrugged. "As long as I can remember we've been restricted to Alioth—except when special permission is granted in a case such as this."

"They can't do this to you," Manning said hotly. "Does the Federation know about this?"

"They know about it."

"I'll speak to J. Barnaby about it when we get back," Manning promised. He started to reach out to pat her on the shoulder, but quickly thought better of it. "He's a big man and he can do something if he wants to. I'll tell him he either sees that you're permitted to go where you want to, or I'll go back to Ali-

oth with you."

"I'd like that," she said softly.

Her voice was so provocative that Manning was about to renew his plea for the removal of the ultrasonic device when there was a knock on the door. Muttering his opinion of visitors in general, he went to see who it was.

The figure who stood in front of the door was enough to make a man slam the door quick. He (she, it?) was as tall as Manning, but there the resemblance ended. His body was rectangular, covered with bits of gayly colored cloth, and supported on three sturdy legs. His head was a perfect square, with one eye and a mouth opening on each of four sides. In the center of the top of his head there was a growth of stiff, antennae-like hair. A ribbon was tied about it some four inches above his head, and the remaining five inches of hair flopped out over it so that it gave the appearance of a mushroom.

"We don't want any," Manning said. He started to close the door.

"Please," said the figure, holding up a broad, flat tentacle. He hissed his sibilants, a common practice among many of the galactic races when they spoke Terran. "I would introduce myself."

"Go ahead," Manning said ungraciously.

"I am Angus McBlla, in all modesty the best guide on Canopus." The eye facing Manning winked slowly. "I am what you might call a black market guide. I will give you service for twenty per cent less than any other guide and with fifty per cent more efficiency. I am sufficiently bonded to cover all accidents which may befall you."

"That's nice," Manning said drily. He was about to add that he hardly needed a guide to find his way around in his room, when he decided he might as well get the next step of his case over. "Just a minute," he said. He turned back to the blonde. "There's a guide here, dear. I might as well go find out about renting one of those asteroids."

"All right," she called. She was using

the shrew-voice again. "But you hurry right back here, Melvin Draco. I didn't travel six hundred and fifty light years just to sit in a hotel room—"

"Yes, dear," Manning said, closing the door gently but firmly. He walked down the corridor with the guide.

"The lady has—ah—a well-developed voice," Angus McBlla said carefully. His shock of hair seemed to be still quivering.

Manning was about to point out that everything about the lady was well-developed when he realized that was hardly the role for a man who wanted to get rid of his wife. "You can say that again, brother," he said.

"Did you wish to go somewhere?" the guide inquired politely. "Or did you merely wish to get out of the room?"

Manning laughed. "I can see you've had experience with Terrans," he said. "I want to find a second-hand asteroid dealer named Dzanku Dzanku. Know where he's located?"

"The *honest* Rigelian? It is well that you asked me to guide you. His place is in the center of town and most difficult to find. But Angus McBlla will take you there with ease. Come."

III

THE Rigelian's place of business occupied a corner lot in the center of Canopusia. Across two sides of the lot there were huge banners announcing his presence:

"DIZZY" DZANKU, THE HONEST
RIGELIAN—KING OF THE SEC-
OND-HAND ASTEROIDS—MY
PRICES ARE SO LOW YOU'RE
CRAZY IF YOU DON'T TAKE AD-
VANTAGE OF ME.

A small one-room bungalow snuggled in one corner of the lot. There were, of course, no actual asteroids on the lot, but it was filled with scaled models of the ones he had to rent or sell.

Angus McBlla accompanied Manning

to the corner and then went into a sense-lounge* to wait until he had concluded his business. Manning entered the office of the Honest Rigelian.

The individual in the office was undoubtedly a Rigelian. He was no taller than Manning, but he probably weighed at least a ton by Terra standards. His thick, square torso was supported by two legs, each as thick as a tree trunk. From the upper part of his body projected six tentacles. His face was small and expressionless, with three eye-stalks raised several inches above it.

For a moment the Terran and the Rigelian stared at each other. As J. Barnaby had pointed out earlier, if this were an honest Rigelian, then it would probably be the only one that Manning would ever see. Yet in some mysterious fashion he had the distinct impression that this one was honest. Since he had come expecting to believe just the opposite, this was surprising. In the meantime, he noticed that the Rigelian was regarding him with something like astonishment in each of his three eyes.

"You are a Terran?" the Rigelian finally asked.

"Of course," Manning said.

"Strange . . . you must be a new model. I can't ever remember meeting one quite like you. . . ."

"What's so strange about me?" Manning demanded.

The Rigelian realized that he was hardly acting in the proper way to a potential customer and his tentacles waved in mild agitation. "I—that is—you seem somewhat more distinctive than the average Terran," he said. It was obvious that he was lying, an interesting fact in itself since Rigelians were noted for their smooth lying. "Can I help you in some way?"

"I'm looking for Mr. Dzanku."

*Due to the Anti-Sense League and the McCarrion Space Entry Act of 3159, sense-lounges are unknown on Terra, but they are found in great numbers on most other planets which have considerable inter-galactic traffic. They are primarily for those races with more complex and sensitive sense organs and humans can stay in them any length of time without having any reaction at all. A sense-lounge will have numerous small cubicles into which patrons can retire. The cubicle is then filled with a combination of sounds and smells which are intoxicating.

"You've found him," the Rigelian said, recovering his professional enthusiasm. "I am Dizzy Dzanku, the Honest Rigelian. Every asteroid comes with a ninety day guarantee. If it's a crypt-asteroid you're interested in, I guarantee those for life." He gave a well rehearsed laugh.

"My name is Melvin Draco," Manning said. "The little woman and I are up here on a vacation and I want to rent an asteroid."

"I see," Dzanku said, rubbing his tentacles together. "I have some rather fine Honeymoon Specials. . . ."

"No honeymoon," Manning said sourly. He hoped that he sounded like a jaded husband. "But I would like something fairly quiet so my wife can't be inviting too many people to drop in on us. I'm up here for a rest."

"Of course," the Rigelian said. He glanced shrewdly at Manning. "Something with twin bedrooms, perhaps?"

"Fine," Manning said. "If they are also soundproofed so much the better."

"To be sure," said Dzanku, with an air of having dealt with such Terrans before. "I have several which I think might fill the bill. Would you like to step out to look at the models?"

They went out on the lot where the Rigelian displayed his models. There were several asteroids that seemed about right. Those that were for rent had small modern homes, equipped with the latest model of robot-servants, and included a small spaceabout for trips down to the planet. Manning finally settled on one which was also furnished with a tiny hunting lodge at a good safe distance from the main house. He paid the advance rent and the Rigelian assured him that the spaceabout would be at the port by the time he could arrive there.

Manning stopped at the sense-lounge for the guide, who seemed a trifle gayer for his pick-me-up, and they returned to the hotel. He checked out and Angus McBilla guided him and Fanya back to the spaceport. He insisted on giving Manning his visinumber in case his serv-

ices might be needed later. Then Manning and Fanya blasted off for the asteroid.

The next two days passed pleasantly enough—except for the fact that Manning Draco still had to keep his distance with one of the most beautiful blondes he had ever seen. The efficiency of the device she wore was enough to make a man lose faith in modern science.

ON THE morning of the third day, a Canopusian copter dropped by the asteroid and left some mail, one letter addressed to Mr. Melvin Draco. It was from the Marital Relations Bureau of Canopus and its contents were almost identical with the letter Manning had seen in the Greater Solarian office.

"Well, it looks like we're getting somewhere, baby," he told Fanya. "It won't be long now."

Her blue eyes were intense as she stared back at him. "It can't be too soon for me," she said.

Manning was flattered that her eagerness seemed to match his own. He had noticed her becoming more tense and restless during the two days they had been on the asteroid.

"There's just one thing I don't understand," he said. "How did J. Barnaby manage to instill such loyalty in you? Why bother to keep your word, since he is so obviously using you?"

"It's not loyalty," she answered. "The device I'm wearing broadcasts a signal to a receiver in Mr. Cruikshank's office. If I remove it, he will know it at once and he swore he could have the space patrol here before I—before we would even have a chance to get acquainted."

"He would too," Manning said, adding a few choice observations on the man who was his superior.

"But," she said softly, "he promised that he would disconnect the receiver the minute he heard from you that the case is solved."

"There must be a catch in it somewhere," grumbled Manning. "I never knew J. Barnaby to be so generous. But,

in the meantime, I'd better run along and see our Mr. Nadyl."

She blew him a kiss as he left the house.

On the way down to Canopus, Manning put in a call for Angus McBlla and when he arrived at the spaceport the guide was already waiting for him.

"I want to go to twenty-seven Circle Square," he told the guide. "You know where it is?"

"Nothing to it," Angus said as he hailed an air-cab. He chuckled as they climbed in. "You know, Circle Square created quite an interest when the Canopusians first started trying to interest the rest of the universe in coming here by sending out pamphlets. But the attraction died as soon as the first bunch of galactic scholars arrived."

"Why?" Manning asked.

"Well, the sales literature of the Chamber of Commerce gave the impression that the Canopusians, in building Circle Square, had finally managed to square a circle. But all they had actually done was build the street on two levels. The first level was a square and the second level was a circle."

"Clever, these Canopusians," Manning said drily.

Within a few minutes, Angus guiding the driver, the aircab set down on the upper level of Circle Square and let them out. Angus pointed out number 27 and once more went to a sense-lounge to wait for his client.

THE office of the Marital Relations Bureau turned out to be a lavish place. The lighting was subtle, giving the impression of being standard Romance lighting. Actually, Manning soon realized, the combination was an exaggeration of the usual lighting guaranteed to stimulate romantic emotions. As a result, he guessed, a few minutes in the reception room could almost be certain to turn genuine love to hate. He also suspected that there was an Antagonist perfume being sprayed into the room, but he could not be certain.

The receptionist was a Canopusian. She took Manning's name and asked him to wait. She made a couple of attempts to get him to talking about his problems, but gave up when she had no success.

It was about fifteen minutes before she told Manning he could go in. She indicated the door back of her desk and he went through, into one of the most luxurious offices he had ever seen. Everything in it, in terms of color and lighting, had been planned to establish trust in the occupant. Again, Manning thought he caught a faint scent of one of the dependency perfumes*, but it was so slight he couldn't swear to it.

Nottyl Nadyl was short and fat. He was no more than four feet tall, but his rounded body was almost as wide as the desk behind which he sat. His head was another, smaller balloon. He was partly bald, but a luxurious growth of coarse hair sprouted from the back of his head, hanging halfway down his back. A broad smile crinkled the flesh up around his four eyes, giving him a jolly appearance.

"Come in, come in," he called as Manning stopped in the doorway. "Welcome to the Marital Relations Bureau of Canopus—the refuge of bruised spirits, the home of last resorts. Come in, sir."

Manning took the chair in front of the desk and examined the creature who beamed at him. He remembered that J. Barnaby had said Nadyl was an Algolian. Manning had met a number of Algolians. He was certain that Angus McBlla, the guide, was also from Algol—but Nadyl seemed to be from a different race than any of the others he'd seen.

"I am Nottyl Nadyl, at your service," the Algolian said. "No marital problem too difficult for us. Your name, sir?" He still smiled broadly, but his eyes were studying Manning with a humorless gaze.

"Melvin Draco," said Manning. He was

*The entire line of Hypno-Perfumes had, of course, been banned throughout the galaxy in 2963, after the scandal caused by the Crunchy Suit Company spraying an entire planet just before they started a planet-wide viscist campaign to unload an inventory of shoddy clothes. It was rumored, however, that a few companies still used the perfumes, adulterated with some new chemical that made it almost impossible to detect them without the most delicate of instruments.

certain the Algolian already knew his name.

"And how did you happen to seek our services, Mr. Draco?"

"You sent me a letter," Manning said, pulling it from his pocket.

"We send out so many letters," murmured Nadyl. "So there is a rift in your conjugal bliss—do you find it difficult to understand me, Mr. Draco? Should I speak more simply?"

"Of course, I understand you; I'm hardly an idiot," Manning said irritably.

"Of course not," the Algolian said hastily, but his voice lacked conviction. "You are a Terran?"

"I'm a Terran," Manning was beginning to wonder what some of these aliens on Canopus thought Terrans were like; this was the second time he'd been asked doubtfully about his origin. He checked the impulse to look to see if his clothing was disarranged. For a minute he felt like the man at whom the famous Tongue-Shrinker* ads were aimed.

WHATEVER it was that was disturbing the Algolian, he dismissed it. "Well," he said briskly, "what seems to be your problem, Mr. Draco?"

"My wife," Manning said solemnly, "is a very beautiful woman and I am quite fond of her. But the poor woman has a most unpleasant voice which she uses almost constantly. And lately she seems to have decided that a husband's place is across the room from his wife."

"A most unfortunate situation," the Algolian agreed pleasantly. His tentacles busied themselves with things on the desk in a manner reminding Manning of J. Barnaby Cruikshank. "We find it to be, however, a rather common complaint. But not one, I might add, which offers any obstacles to our services."

"Just how do you work?" Manning asked.

"As stated in my letter, there is no

charge for consultation. If I succeed—and I have *never* failed, Mr. Draco—in eliminating your problem, there will be a charge of one hundred credits."

"That seems fair enough."

"But," the Algolian said, "you must follow all of my recommendations to the letter."

Manning squirmed in his seat, giving a good imitation of a man who wants to be sure of something, but doesn't know how to approach it. "The—ah—treatment is permanent?" he asked.

"Oh, decidedly permanent," the Algolian said cheerfully.

Manning peered at the letter again, then glanced hesitatingly at Nadyl. "I was especially interested in this sentence in your letter which refers to the possibility of—ah—making a profit. . . ."

"I'm glad you mentioned that," Nadyl said. "It is always a pleasure to do business with a practical man. Do you carry insurance, Mr. Draco?"

"Only a small policy on myself. . . ."

"Insurance," the Algolian said sententiously, "is one of the wisest investments a man can make. I suggest that at your earliest opportunity you take out a joint policy covering yourself and your wife. A policy for not less than one hundred thousand credits. One never knows when the grim reaper may snatch away a beloved and it is well to be financially prepared for such events."

"I suppose so," Manning said dutifully.

"We trust, of course, that you and your wife will both enjoy the fruits of longevity, but in the event of any untoward fatality to your wife I suggest that you deal with the Happy Asteroid Mortuary here on Canopus. The owner, Encycla Grave, is from my own planet and I can assure you that he operates with the utmost tact. He will handle all details for a quiet burial on an asteroid, which will then be power-driven out into space, leaving no trace of—er—your recent bereavement. Although he is rather expensive, he is worth it."

"How expensive?"

*Do you retain sophisticated poise in all circumstances, or are you often embarrassed by lack of TC? When you see something you want and can't have, does your tongue hang out? If so, buy Mechel's Patented Tongue-Shrinker. (adv.)

*Tongue-Control.

"Fifty per cent of the amount of the policy on your wife," the Algolian said. "This may seem large until you consider the extent of his services and the fact that there is still a comfortable margin between the amount you retain and the one year premium you will have paid."

"Let me get this straight," Manning said bluntly. His forehead was wrinkled with thought. "If I take out an insurance policy for a hundred thousand credits or more, and if I agree to give half of it to this undertaker fellow, then you'll kill my wife. Is that it?"

The Algolian threw up his tentacles in horror. "My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "must you talk like a character on a visiscreen thriller? Rather let us put it this way: You have a marital problem. Your wife's present attitude and actions are an obstacle to your complete happiness. I am an individual who is deeply concerned about the happiness of everyone. If, therefore, you agree to follow all of my various suggestions, I will undertake to eliminate the things which stand in the way of your happiness. There is, you understand, no guarantee of anything; neither is there any cost to you until you have had your present discomfort alleviated."

"You certainly do a lot of talking to say something that's pretty simple," Manning observed. "But I guess that's your way, so we'll leave it at that."

"Good," said the Algolian. "You may put your trust in me, Mr. Draco. Good day, sir."

"I'll wait to hear from you," Manning said.

IV

BACK on the asteroid, there was nothing to do but wait. Under the circumstances, that wasn't easy. During the day, Manning went down to the hunting lodge. There wasn't anything to hunt, but he didn't mind. The idea was to get away from Fanya. The lodge was equipped with a number of devices to amuse the idle rich, but most of these

were of an erotic nature so he ignored them, since they would only lead his thoughts back to the blonde. In the evening, he usually tried to escape to his room and watch the visicasts. To stay in the same room with the blonde too long was a mistake; he'd soon find himself wanting to defy science.

The morning after his visit to the marriage counselor, Manning and Fanya had their first visitors. A U-pilot ship drifted in and set down on the small port in front of the house. The hatch swung open and two individuals stepped out. One of them was a nondescript Terran; the other was an Algolian, but of still a different species.

Despite his bulky size and the usual three legs*, he was roughly humanoid in appearance. His head was shaped very much like that of a human. It was completely bald and there were two eyes in front and two in the rear. The slight similarity was helped by the fact that the lower part of his face was encased in a bushy beard. The beard seemed to have a life of its own, indicating that the hairs were sense organs.

The visitors turned out to be Sam Warren and Jaba Woo, the representatives of the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated. They pretended to have dropped by accidentally and Manning gave no indication that he had other thoughts on the subject.

After considerable idle chatter, the subject of insurance came up. Manning admitted that he might be in the market for some and inquired about joint policies. It just happened that the two insurance salesmen had come equipped for his special problems and it wasn't long before Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Draco were each insured for two hundred thousand credits. Manning had decided to double the minimum suggested by Nadyl on the grounds that this might make

*In the small amount of literature on the subject, it had been noted that there were always three identical features about Algolians, although everything else might be different. These were the three legs, the four eyes, and that any hair on their bodies were invariably sense organs. But because no one had yet seen two Algolians who looked alike, these features were about the only way of identifying natives of that planet.

him more eager.

"The place," he said to Fanya when the two happy insurance salesmen had left, "is lousy with Algolians. I wonder what the fourth one will look like?"

"Are you going to see him?" Fanya asked.

Manning shook his head. "All I was told was that I should secure his services if anything happened to you. It might be unseemly if I were to go hire an undertaker in advance."

The blonde giggled.

"Are you sure," Manning asked with concern, "that you're not going to be in any danger?"

"Positive," she said. "There are ways, of course, that he could kill me, but they all require personal contact and the device Mr. Cruikshank gave me will protect me from that as well as from what you have in mind . . . but you must hurry, Manning."

"I'll hurry," he said. "And I resent the use of the word 'protection' in connection with my intentions. I'll make you eat that word."

"Any time," she said softly.

Manning thrust his hands deeply into his pockets so that they wouldn't get ideas of their own. "In the meantime," he said savagely, "we have to wait it out."

AND wait they did, but not too long. That night there was a call for Manning over a closed circuit on the visiscreen and a clerk in the Milky Way Union read a spacegram to him. It was from Nottyl Nadyl and merely said: "I suggest that tomorrow you make an early visit to your hunting lodge." That was all.

Early the following morning, Manning went to the hunting lodge. Despite Fanya's assurance, he was a little nervous about leaving her there to face whatever the jolly Algolian counselor had in mind. He grew even more fidgety when he heard a small ship landing near the house. He almost held his breath, waiting for the next step.

When it came he almost jumped out of his chair. It was the rapid firing of a sub-atomic gun, guaranteed to bring down anything up to a Marfakian Lair-Lizard which weighed seventy tons. It hardly seemed possible that a frail creature like the blonde could withstand a round of shots from that gun.

Manning ran from the lodge and dashed frantically toward the house, the light gravity of the asteroid permitting him to cover twenty feet at a leap. Even so, he was no more than halfway to the house when he saw a small ship leaving the asteroid with a rush.

Reaching the house, he ran into the living room and stopped, horrified at what he saw. Fanya Sera was sprawled on the floor. The room and a good portion of the furniture had been wrecked by the shots that had been fired.

He was shocked out of his grief by the sound of soft laughter. Then Fanya was sitting up, smiling at him.

"You're not hurt?" he asked in astonishment.

"Not at all," she said. "I just thought it more dramatic to fall this way and let him think he had killed me. Oh, I may have a few small bruises, but that'll be all. See."

She opened the front of her dress and stood up. There were a series of small red spots, running from her navel to her collar bone, but so far as he could see, that was all the damage. Knowing that she was unharmed, however, Manning found it difficult to confine his gaze to the region of the bruises.

The blonde laughed again and slowly closed her dress.

"Now what do we do?" she asked.

"Ordinarily that would be a stupid question," Manning said drily. "As it is, however, we merely wait until Mr. Nadyl has time to get back to his office and then I will call and tell him that he's failed. That ought to throw him into enough of a panic so things will get interesting."

They waited, but not as long as they had expected to. Manning was just about to go make his call when they heard a

ship coming in to land. A moment later, there was a soft note from the door announcer. Manning went and threw it open.

The fourth Algolian stood there. He was all of eight feet tall, his body not much thicker than a man's leg. Again there were the three legs and the four eyes, but they were quite different in appearance from those of the others. And this one, Manning noticed when he turned partly sideways had his hair in the back, looking somewhat like a rooster's tail. He was dressed entirely in black and there was a solemn expression on his thin face.

"Mr. Melvin Draco?" he asked in a melancholy voice.

"Yes," Manning said.

"I regret to intrude upon your moment of tragedy, Mr. Draco, but there are certain traditions we must carry on, painful though they be. But I want you to know that my heart goes out to you in your hour of grief and I stand ready to remove much of the burden from your shoulders."

"Who are you?" Manning asked.

"Encyclia Grave, of the Happy Asteroid Mortuary. Now there are a few trifling—" He caught a glimpse of Fanya in the background and broke off. "Ah, I see there is someone with you. A relative, perhaps . . ."

"Oh, that's my wife," Manning said.

THERE was sheer amazement on the Algolian's face. "Surely you jest, sir? It is hardly possible you could have remarried so quickly, to say nothing of the fact that it would be in extremely bad taste—"

"But I haven't remarried," Manning said patiently. "This is my only wife. We arrived from Terra only a few days ago. Now what was it you wanted to see me about?"

"I don't understand," the Algolian said in some agitation. "Your wife—oh, dear, this is terrible. You must excuse me. . . ." He turned and ran for his ship, his long legs twinkling over the ground.

It took him only a minute to reach it and then the ship was lancing up into the sky.

Inside the house, Manning and Fanya laughed together.

"He'll report back to his friend, the happiness boy," Manning said, "and by the time I call. Mr. Nadyl's nerves should be in a fine state. Or maybe I'll beat him to it."

He started for the other room only to be called back by the blonde. "There's another ship coming in," she said.

Manning listened and heard it. He came back to stand beside her. "Who do you suppose is interested in your corpse now?"

They heard the ship ease to the ground and cut to silence. Then a moment later, the door announcer sounded again. Manning strode across the room and flung open the door.

This time it was a Terran who stood there. He was a tall man, lean of frame and hard of eye. His clothes were a little old-fashioned, as was the snap-brim hat he wore. His gaze bored into Manning's.

"I'm Mickey Hatchet," he said in a clipped voice.

Manning nodded, surprised. He was familiar with the name.*

"My name is Draco," Manning said. "This is Mrs. Draco."

Mickey Hatchet's gaze raked over the blonde. There was something in his eyes that said he might have been interested if there had only been time.

"Caught the vibrations of some shots," he said. "What's the caper?"

"Shots? Caper?" Manning said. "I'm afraid I don't know what you mean. My

* So was everybody else in the galaxy who ever watched the visicasts. Once every week, year in and year out, Mickey Hatchet waded through gallons of gore and over the bodies of beautiful babes for the entertainment of untold billions. But few people knew the full story of Mickey Hatchet. In the beginning he had been merely the creation of a writer named Spunky Malone—the last of the private detectives. But over the years, as he grew more and more popular, the author began to identify himself with the character he had created. Finally, Spunky Malone had his name legally changed to Mickey Hatchet. Then he arranged to have all the visifilms done in half of each year; the other half, Mickey Hatchet roamed the universe (he owned the only private detective license in existence by this time), fighting evil where he found it and trying to make this a better universe in which to live. It was a one-sided battle, but there was nothing that could make Mickey Hatchet swerve from the firmness of his purpose—nothing.

wife and I were just sitting here talking."

Mickey Hatchet shoved past him into the room. He looked around, taking in the damaged furniture and walls. His gaze raked over the body of the blonde.

"You and your wife must've had some pretty hard words," he said. He strode over and grabbed Manning by the shoulders. "I don't like it," he said. "Something's going on here. It's in the air. I can smell it."

"Nothing that I can't handle," Manning said, stepping out of his grip.

"Look," said Mickey Hatchet. "I'm in this. To the finish. I don't like being in it any better than you would. But that's the way it is. There are a lot of alley cats in this universe, who'll do anything for a fast credit; they don't care whose blood it is. But it's my universe, too. I'd like it to be a clean place to live and I'm going to see that it is. You understand that?"

"I think so," Manning said.

"Okay." Mickey Hatchet's gaze raked over the blonde again. He saw that the zipper on her dress hadn't been pulled all the way to the top. He pointed a bony finger and whirled on Manning. "The broad had her dress open?"

"Yes," Manning admitted.

"And she's wearing nothing under it?"

"Y-yes. But—"

"Happens to me all the time," Mickey Hatchet said wearily. He pointed the finger again, this time at her middle. "There's only one thing to do. *Pow!*" He turned and strode toward the door.

"Wait a minute," Manning said. "There is something you might be able to do."

"You want a little private eye work you've come to the right place. What?"

"Pretty soon there'll be another ship coming here. When it leaves, it'll leave in a hurry. Think you can tail it?"

"I'll tail him so close you'll think I grew on his back," said Mickey Hatchet.

"How do I get in touch with you?" Manning asked.

"Call my ship. The *Trigger Happy*."

Fanya murmured something in her own tongue* but neither man paid any attention.

"All right," Manning said. "I'll get in touch with you later."

"I'll be around," Mickey Hatchet said. He turned and slammed out of the house. A moment later his ship took off as though it had a burr under its rockets.

"I've heard a lot about him," Manning said. He looked at the blonde with curiosity. "Tell me, did you have any urge to rip your dress off while he was in the room?"

"No, but I do now," she said. One hand went to the zipper on her dress.

"Not now," Manning said hastily and fled to the other room.

MANNING put in a call to Nottyl Nadyl. The latter's face, when it appeared on the screen, was not as jolly as it had been the last time Manning had seen it. It was impossible to tell since there was no color on the screen, but Manning thought his face looked a little green. The undertaker must have already been in touch with him.

"What kind of a bungler are you?" Manning demanded. "My wife is still alive."

"I don't understand it," the Algolian said. A ray of hope struggled into his face. "I don't suppose the accident has changed your mind—made you realize that the bonds of matrimony are more precious than you thought?"

"Certainly not," snapped Manning. "I made a bargain and I expect you to fulfill it."

The Algolian sighed heavily. "Very well. I suggest that you go back to the hunting lodge. I shall be there shortly and this time I guarantee that nothing will go wrong."

"It better not," Manning said and broke the connection.

He told Fanya to get set for another visit, then went on down to the lodge. This time he felt less restless, but he

* What she'd said was, "If a man answers, hang up."

sat by a window where he could watch the house.

It wasn't long before he saw the ship coming in. But instead of landing as it had before, it merely swooped low over the house. Then it went into a steep, rapid climb. Immediately afterward there was an explosion that rocked the lodge.

Manning hadn't expected a bomb and his old fears returned. He ran for the house as rapidly as he could. Even as he ran, however, he saw a second ship dart out from behind a distant asteroid and take out after the first one.

When he reached the house, it wasn't necessary to open the door. While the rest of the house was intact, what had once been the living room was only smoking rubble. That meant a controlled oxygen bomb, one of the most deadly weapons known to the civilized galaxy.

And there in the center of the rubble, her dress scorched and in tatters, stood Fanya Sera. She laughed at the sight of Manning's face.

When he was finally convinced that she was unharmed—he'd started to pinch her to make certain but a warning tremor had proved the ultrasonic device was equally indestructible—he relaxed.

"I think that'll be the last attempt," he told her. "I want to make sure that Nadyl knows he's failed again. Then I'm going down to Canopus and clean this up while they're still in a panic." He went into his room and put in a call to Nadyl's office. He left a message with the Canopusian receptionist. Then he rejoined the blonde.

"I'm on my way," he said. He noticed that, if anything, the damaged condition of her dress made her even more appealing. "I don't suppose you'd care to shut that gadget off long enough to give me a kiss for luck?"

"I'd like to, but I won't," she said.

"I thought you wouldn't," he said with a sigh. "Well, by the time I come back it'll all be over."

"I'll be waiting for you in your room," she said. There was even more promise

in the quality of her voice than there was in the words.

"With the lights out?" he asked with a grin.

"With the lights out," she said solemnly. "You can turn them on later, if you like, but they'll be out when you arrive."

He pretended to catch the kiss she threw and tuck it in his pocket. Then he went down to his ship.

V

ON THE WAY down to Canopus, Manning put in a call to the guide he had used before. He wanted to be able to move fast and he knew that he wouldn't be able to get anywhere without a guide. His call was taken by an answering service, but the girl assured him that Angus McBilla would be at the spaceport by the time Manning was.

He was, too. Manning explained to him the places he wanted to go and they started out in an air-cab.

The first stop was at the hotel where Jaba Woo lived. He wasn't in and he hadn't been all day. Sam Warren lived at the same hotel, so Manning dropped in there. The little Terran claimed he didn't know where his Algolian partner was. He told Manning that Jaba Woo had been supposed to be there an hour earlier so that they could keep an appointment with a client, but he hadn't even called. His concern seemed to be sincere.

Manning picked up his guide in the hotel's sense-lounge and they went on to the Happy Asteroid Mortuary. The building was an imposing structure, designed in the shape of an asteroid. There were a number of employees around, mostly Canopusians, but no Encycla Grave. By questioning the employees, Manning discovered that he hadn't been there since some time before he had called at Manning's rented asteroid.

By this time, Manning was expecting the pattern to be repeated. Neverthe-

less, he went to Circle Square and the office of the Marital Relations Bureau. The Canopusian receptionist was there. So were two clients. But that was all. The receptionist had no idea what was delaying Mr. Nadyl. She suggested that Manning sit down and wait with the other two men.

By this time, Manning was convinced that his hunch was right. He went over to the sense-lounge where Angus McBlla was waiting and used the public visibooth to put in a call to Terra. When J. Barnaby Cruikshank showed up on the screen, he quickly reported what had been going on.

"I think," he said, "that Nadyl must have realized that the bomb also failed to kill Fanya. Probably had a ground scanner in his ship. That must have made him realize it was a trap. He notified the other two and they all started looking for a hole. I'm hoping that Mickey Hatchet will have something for me on Nadyl. Otherwise it may be tough."

"What about Sam Warren and this Dzanku?" J. Barnaby asked.

"I haven't seen Dzanku and I think Sam Warren's in the clear."

"I don't pay you to think," snapped J. Barnaby. "I'm telling you they have to be mixed up in it. Check that Rigelian."

"All right," Manning said. "In the meantime, I'm going to come out in the open. That'll let me check a lot of angles I've had to stay away from as long as I was supposed to be a tourist."

"Dig up everything you can," said J. Barnaby. "But I think you've got enough evidence to make the beginnings of a case. We don't want them slipping through our fingers. I'm going to tell the Federation police to issue pick-up orders on all five of them. Maybe they'll be in custody by the time you've finished checking."

"Maybe," Manning said doubtfully.

"How are you getting along with Fanya?" J. Barnaby asked. There was something suspiciously like a chuckle in

his voice.

"You know how I'm getting along with her," Manning said darkly. "But I'll soon wash up this case and then it'll be a different story."

"When you've finished this case," J. Barnaby said sternly, "I order you to come directly home. I forbid you to take any time to play around with that blonde. I—"

"Get lost," Manning said and cut the connection.

HE COLLECTED his guide and they went looking for the second-hand asteroid dealer. They found him in his little office. It turned out that he, too, was looking for the Algolian undertaker. The latter had bought a crypt-asteroid from him the day before, but hadn't yet paid for it.

"You think he's skipped out?" Dzanku asked Manning.

"I don't know," Manning said evasively. "Why should he skip? He has a successful business. I wouldn't think he'd walk out on that."

"I don't know," the Rigelian said. "You can never tell. . . ."

"You think he's mixed up in something crooked?"

"I didn't say that."

"You did a lot of business with him?" Manning asked.

"Yes."

"How did he pay you in the past?"

"Always in cash," Dzanku said. He hesitated, then went on. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Draco, that's why I was a little suspicious of him. You take an established business man, when he always pays in cash you begin to wonder how established he is. It looks like he might always be ready to move fast."

"I see what you mean," Manning said. "By the way, did you ever have any dealings with a Nottyl Nadyl?"

The Rigelian looked thoughtful, then shook his head. "I don't remember anyone by that name."

"What about Jaba Woo?"

Again the Rigelian shook his head.

His three eyes peered intently at Manning. "Both of them Algolians?" he asked.

Manning nodded.

"I don't know them," Dzanku said, "but if it means anything you can be sure they know each other. All Algolians have a very close relationship."

They talked some more and Manning had the distinct impression that the Rigelian was leveling with him. He had an impulse to warn him that the police would soon be after him, but suppressed it.

After leaving Dzanku, Manning found another public visibooth. He asked the operator to locate the ship *Trigger Happy*. It took about five minutes, but finally the voice of Mickey Hatchet answered. The screen, however, remained blank.

"This is Draco," Manning said. "Why aren't you using video?"

"Can't," came the cryptic answer. "That would get me in real trouble."

"What about that ship you were tailing?" Manning asked.

"Better not report on this hook-up," Mickey Hatchet said grimly. "Come to my ship and I'll fill you in."

"Where are you?"

"Six-two over three-zero at forty thousand feet."

Muttering his opinion of the Universe's last private eye, Manning left the booth. He picked up Angus McBilla and back they went to the spaceport. Ordering Angus to wait, Manning went up in his own ship. He soon found Mickey Hatchet's ship. He edged in next to it, switched on the grappling magnet, and a few minutes later was stepping through the hatch of the other ship.

THEN he found out why Mickey Hatchet had refused to use video. He wasn't alone. There was a lush-looking red-headed Terran girl with him. Manning had no trouble appreciating her best points for she wore no clothing at all.

"A friend of yours?" Manning said.

"Ahh," said Mickey Hatchet, making a sound of disgust in his throat. The girl had edged closer to him and he reached out and gave her a shove.

"Hon-ey," she said plaintively in protest. Her voice came from the back of her throat and sounded like she was in the grip of a personal emotional crisis.

"I hate to intrude on your love life," Manning said drily, "but I would like to know about that ship you were tailing."

"Sure. That guy that bombed your place, he barrelled out of there like a shot. But I was on his tail and stuck there as close as a bill collector . . . get out of here." The last was to the red-head who was edging up again.

"Hon-ey," the girl said.

"Dames," said Mickey Hatchet in disgust. "Anyway, there we were—cutting around through that asteroid field like a couple of kids playing hide-and-seek. And all the time this dame was a stow-away on my ship—beat it, baby."

"Hon-ey," the girl said.

"Scram out of here," Mickey Hatchet said to the redhead. "I'm trying to talk to the man."

"Hon-ey," the girl said, starting to edge up again.

"I'll plow you," Mickey Hatchet spat. The girl didn't stop. Mickey Hatchet drew a gun, leveled it and pulled the trigger. The girl fell to the floor, twitched a few times and then was quiet.* There was a hole in her belly and the blood was oozing out. Mickey Hatchet used his foot to slide the body into the escape hatch. He kicked a lever and the body shot out into space. "The garbage detail can pick her up tomorrow," he said. He patted his gun. "This is the one thing that never fails me in handling those dames. Now where was I?"

* Mickey Hatchet was actually not as harmful as it might seem. The only thing that made him trigger happy was the attention of undraped females. Very few girls had conducted themselves in this manner for years, if they ever had, so they were fairly safe. The redhead was, in truth, a cleverly-made robot. The producer of the Mickey Hatchet visiscreen show had a number of these robots made up each year and planted in strategic spots. They were activated by Mickey Hatchet's presence. He never knew the truth of the matter, but the robots did a lot to keep him happy.

"Playing hide-and-seek, I think," Manning said. He had been fascinated by the little drama he'd watched. He'd heard about this side of Mickey Hatchet's life, but this was the first time he'd seen it in action.

"Yeah. Like I said, I was barrelling after this guy when suddenly that dame appeared. With nothing on, just as you saw. Really stacked, too, if you know what I mean, but I was busy. I told her to get lost. Then she came over and sat right down on my lap. I was trying to figure out what her game was, and wondering if I should just sap her, and while that was going on I lost that guy. He dodged behind one of those asteroids and by the time I could get the dame off my lap and get straightened out, he was gone."

"All right," Manning said with a sigh. He knew there was no point in saying what he thought. "That's the way it goes sometimes. Stick around, Mickey, and I'll let you know the score."

"You want me to go down and smoke them out?"

"No, you stay here. Just circle around until you hear from me." Manning went back to his own ship. His last glimpse of Mickey Hatchet, the private eye was shaking his head. "Dames," he was saying.

When he got back to the spaceport, he had his program all mapped out. With Angus McBlla guiding him, he made the rounds. Starting with space customs, then the local banks, and a number of business houses. When he'd finished, he had collected some interesting facts.

JABA WOO was the only Algolian who had officially entered Canopus. He was also the only one of the three who had a bank account. Both Nottyl Nadyl and Encycla Grave had paid cash for everything they bought. What was even more interesting was that he could find no resident address for either Nadyl or Grave. Jaba Woo had made large deposits coinciding with each one of the

deaths in the insurance cases. He had also made large withdrawals, but he still had a very comfortable balance. He hadn't been to the bank to close the account, but he had made a visit, asking the bank to transfer his account to the First Galactic Bank on Pictor. Manning arrived at the bank just in time. As Chief Investigator for Greater Solarian he also had police powers, so the transfer was stopped.

The spaceport officials were certain that no one—especially an Algolian—had left the planet. Yet the three Algolians had managed to vanish completely, unless the police had managed to find them. Quite obviously they had been ready to vanish the minute anything went wrong with their racket. And the minute Nadyl had realized that "Mrs. Draco" was an indestructible, he had flashed the word that the game was up.

"Angus," Manning said to the guide as they left the bank, "did you know Jaba Woo; Nottyl Nadyl and Encycla Grave?"

"I knew them," the guide said. "Not well, you understand."

"I thought that all Algolians maintained a very close relationship. That's what I was told."

"True up to a point," the guide admitted. "But you have to consider the class differences. The ones you mention were all business men while I am a mere guide. They would have considered it degrading to be too friendly with me."

They walked past a corner where some workers were excavating for a new building. The blasting was being done with ultrasonics. Manning could hear nothing, although it was strong enough to make him aware of pressure on his nerves. But he noticed that Angus McBlla's face contorted with pain. The knot of hair on his head momentarily lost its mushroom-shape, seemed to be almost trying to move over to the side of his face away from the blasting. Then they were past the corner and the

sensitive hearing-hair resumed its shape.

"You know that I'm trying to find them," Manning said. "Would you have any idea where they've gone?"

The guide shook his head. "Algolians are very hard to find," he said, "when they wish not to be found. Maybe they've left Canopus."

"I don't think so," Manning said. "Well, there are a few other things I want to check, but first take me to the headquarters of the Federation police."

"Sure thing," the guide said cheerfully. "It's not far; we might as well walk."

They had almost reached the police station when Manning had a bright idea. He stopped off at a public visibooth and put in a call to the Solar University on Mars. He was in the booth for a long time, but when he emerged he looked a little more cheerful.

"Did you find them?" the waiting guide asked.

"No," Manning said. "That was a personal call."

When they reached the police station, Angus McBlla was about to head for the nearest sense-lounge, but Manning stopped him. "I'll only be in here long enough to find out if they know anything," he said. "Then we'll go on. You might as well go in with me. You'll get loaded if you keep waiting for me in those joints."

Angus grinned and followed him inside.

LEAVING the guide waiting in the outer office, Manning went in to see the Sector Commander. The police had picked up Sam Warren and Dzanku Dzanku, both of whom were loudly protesting their innocence, but there was no clue to the three Algolians. The police had also duplicated most of Manning's investigations. Dzanku had a comfortable bank account, but there was no related pattern between his deposits and the insurance crimes. Sam Warren not only had no bank account,

but had already hocked his future commissions.

Manning borrowed a small sonic-gun from the Sector Commander. He set it at the lowest intensity and slipped it in his pocket. The Commander walked into the outer office with him.

As they approached Angus McBlla, Manning put his hand in his pocket, tipped the sonic-gun and triggered it.

The Algolian stiffened with the shock, then his flesh moved with a speed that was blinding to watch. The sharp corners of his body blurred and rounded. The flesh on his head writhed, the eyes moving frantically, the antennae-like hair moving down his back.

Manning turned off the sonic-gun. "There," he said, "is our *three* Algolians."

The guide was rapidly resuming his original shape, but the police had stepped in and quickly put force-cuffs on him before they allowed themselves the luxury of curiosity. They were trained to act first and check the accuracy of their actions later.

"Now, would you explain," said the Commander.

"Sure," Manning said. He indicated the guide, whose four eyes were staring angrily at him. "That's Angus McBlla, alias Nottyl Nadyt, alias Encycla Grave, alias Jaba Woo. When he came here, he merely set himself up as four different Algolians, each one looking different. I should have tumbled to it right away. The officials at the spaceport told me that only one Algolian was officially on this planet. Then Jaba Woo was the only one who had a bank account and a residential address. Three of his four personalities were involved in the racket, but the fourth one wasn't. When things started going wrong, he merely made the three vanish. Then as the guide, the unsuspected one, he trotted around with me. That way he could keep an eye on what was happening."

"But," asked the bewildered official, "how could he manage to look entirely different in each case?"

"I had a hunch," Manning said. "All we've ever known about Algolians is that no two have ever been seen that looked alike. Today, when Angus and I passed a spot where they were doing some sonic-blasting, I thought I saw his hair and flesh move as though trying to get away from it. At first, I thought it was my imagination. But then I decided to give my imagination the benefit of the doubt. I called the Solar University and talked to a specialist in alien life. I suggested that he think of Algolians having psycho-adaptable flesh. He got pretty excited.

"They have discovered life that can change its appearance, but they just hadn't thought of that in connection with Algolians. He said that would explain everything. The Algolians are known to be strongly individualistic; he said if they were able to change their appearance at will, they would probably choose to look differently from their fellow Algolians. He suggested that I try a sonic-gun on one of them and if he started to change appearance, then I was on the right track. You saw what happened."

"Take him away," the Commander ordered. Several of his men led the Algolian back in the direction of the cells.

"Now, I need a visiphone," Manning told the Commander.

He was led into a private office and left alone. He put in a call to J. Barnaby and briefly reported.

"Good boy," J. Barnaby said when he'd finished. "I knew I could depend on you to clean it up."

"Just one more thing," Manning said. "Neither Sam Warren nor Dzanku were really mixed up in it. I know you can probably press charges against them, since to some extent they were used by the Algolian, but I suggest you drop them."

CRUIKSHANK shook his head. "They were accessories after the fact, even in the best light. No, they'll have to be charged with that. Maybe I'll see

to it that they're let off with a fine providing they contract to pay off our losses. If they do that I'll keep Warren on and maybe give that Rigelian a job and take it out of their commissions."

Manning argued with him some more, but there was no moving J. Barnaby Cruikshank once he'd made up his mind. Manning finally gave up in disgust.

"Another thing," he said. "Are you keeping your word with Fanya?"

"Of course," J. Barnaby said. "I never break my word. But I'm ordering you to stay away from her."

Manning told him what he could do with his orders.

"Manning, my boy," J. Barnaby said, "I—"

DRACO broke the connection. He was in a hurry to get back to the asteroid, but first he got permission to see Sam Warren and Dzanku.

The Terran and the Rigelian were both in a single cell. They were a sorry looking pair. Manning first told them about the Algolian and what had been going on.

"He actually was pretty stupid," he finished. "I don't know why he wasn't caught long before."

"You're wrong, you know," Dzanku, the Rigelian, said. "I didn't know what was going on, but I can tell you that you are probably the only Terran who could have set a trap for him with any success."

"What do you mean?" Manning asked.

"Algolians are mind readers," Dzanku said, "even as are we Rigelians. They have, however, a very strong secondary mind shield so that I never could see deeply into his mind. But I know that he would have been able to read the intentions of any other Terran."

"Why couldn't he read my mind then?"

"I'm not too sure. Haven't you ever been given a cybernetic M-R?"

"Many times," Manning said. Then

he remembered the peculiar business at the hospital and told the Rigelian about it.

"That must be it," Dzanku said. "Your accident did something that gave you a secondary mind shield—only you are unable to control it, so that it's like a permanent block. I was surprised myself when I met you. It's not like a legitimate mind shield. As a matter of fact, my first impression was that you merely had a very shallow mind—not very bright."

Manning remembered the way "Nadyl" had acted, asking if Manning was able to understand him. It was the way he would have treated someone he considered a moron.

"That's why you were able to trap him," Dzanku said. "He thought you weren't very bright and so he never became suspicious." He studied Manning a minute. "You probably have the beginnings of a genuine mind shield there—thanks to your accident. You ought to take some time off and go to Rigel. We have some excellent mind-trainers there and they might be able to teach you."

"But in the meantime what about us?" Sam Warren asked sourly.

MANNING told them about his conversation with J. Barnaby. He said he'd try to argue with him again, but that he doubted that it would do any good. Sam Warren was pretty downcast by the news, but Dzanku seemed to take it in his stride.

"I expected it," he said. "As a matter of fact, I guess I was foolish ever to think I could get away with being honest. My own people turned against me and no one else would ever believe that I was honest. Believe me, I've learned my lesson. Honesty doesn't pay. I've already been in touch with my home planet and I'll get some help from them—since they're convinced that I've reformed." His eye-stalks bent toward Sam Warren. "I think I can help Sam, too."

"Well, I'll try again," Manning said. "In the meantime, I've got to run along. I've got a heavy date with a blonde."

He had reached the cell door before the Rigelian stopped him.

"One minute," said Dzanku. "I appreciate your attitude toward me in this matter, Mr. Draco. I think I might do one more good deed before I completely reform. You won't mind a bit of advice?"

"Of course not," Manning said. He was puzzled, but waited patiently.

"The blonde you're rushing off to see," Dzanku said. "Is that the lady who was posing as your wife, the one that was indestructible?"

"Yes."

"I believe you mentioned that she's from Alioth?"

"Yes."

The Rigelian sighed heavily. "I don't suppose you'll thank me until later, but didn't you know that Aliothan females are restricted to their own planets? They are only allowed off when there are certain precautions taken, and even then it takes a lot of political pull to arrange it."

"She told me about the restrictions," Manning said impatiently. "I gathered it has something to do with the Aliothan women being subjected by the men."

"The restrictions are imposed by the Federation," Dzanku said. "Aliothans are evolved from a form of life known on your Terra as *Narbonne Lycosa*, or *Lycosa narbonnensis*. Oh, they are highly evolved, having assumed humanoid shape and all, but they have retained a few of the instincts of their ancestors."

"What are you trying to say?" Manning demanded.

"The *Narbonne Lycosa* was a spider," Dzanku said gently. "The female of the species always killed and ate the male immediately after breeding. The Aliothan women have retained this trait. Aliothan males have become too submissive for their taste. The only time that females can be taken away from

their planet is when they are about ready for mating. They'll mate with any humanoid male and find aliens very attractive. So they will agree to any terms so long as it will finally give them a little free time to mate—and then eat. You've been here for several days now, so I imagine that your blonde is very eager—and very hungry."

Manning had a sudden memory of the eager look in Fanya's eyes and of the fact that she hadn't eaten since he had known her. Suddenly, sick at his stomach, he reeled from the cell.

It wasn't until he had reached the spaceport and the *Alpha Actuary* that his mind really started functioning again. When it did, he had an idea. He put in a call to the waiting Mickey Hatchet.

"I've got one last order for you, Mekey," he said. "You know my place on the asteroid?"

"Yeah," said the private eye.

"I want you to go there. Don't bother to knock or anything. Just slam into the first bedroom. There's a blonde in there who's been bothering me. You'll know how to handle her."

"Pow!" said Mickey Hatchet, pointing a finger.

"That's the idea. And thanks, Mick-eye."

"I'll take care of it," the lean private eye said grimly. "Dames." He cut the connection.

Manning took his ship up near the asteroid and waited until he saw the other ship land. He had a brief glimpse of the figure leaping from the ship and

barrelling into the house. Then using the magni-drive on his own ship, he nudged the asteroid out of its orbit.

When he had his ship set for Terra, he finally put in a call to J. Barnaby Cruikshank.

"Manning, boy," J. Barnaby said when he recognized his caller. "I've been trying to locate you everywhere. That Fanya Sera—"

"I know," Manning said. "A fine guy you were. Willing to turn me into a table d'hôte in order to get your lousy case solved."

"You don't understand," J. Barnaby said. "I was going to warn you. I tried to, but you cut me off."

"Sure, but what about just turning her loose that way?"

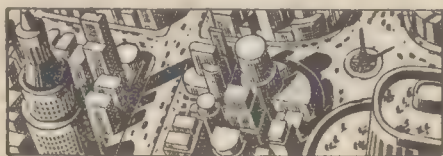
"I've notified the police. What did you do about her?"

Manning chuckled. "I sent Mickey Hatchet over to see her and then I drove the asteroid out into space. You know the old gag about an irresistible force and an immovable object? Well, I've set it in motion. Mickey can't be seduced and Fanya can't be killed—but I'm betting on Mickey. That boy's got guts—even if they are where his brains ought to be."

J. Barnaby laughed with him. "That's my boy," he said. "Come on home. You'll feel better when you get here. I've just hired a new secretary."

Manning Draco's face lit up with interest.

"Unlike Mickey Hatchet, I like dames," he said. "But I got to admit I drew the line at this Fanya. I can't stand a dame who eats in bed."



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They had no way of knowing where they'd go in the—

Prize Ship

By **PHILIP K. DICK**

GENERAL THOMAS GROVES gazed glumly up at the battle maps on the wall. The thin black line, the iron ring around Ganymede, was still there. He waited a moment, vaguely hoping, but the line did not go away. At last he turned and made his way out of the chart wing, past the rows of desks.

At the door Major Siller stopped him. "What's wrong, sir? No change in the war?"

"No change."

"What'll we do?"



A tiny man appeared and shot an arrow

"Come to terms. Their terms. We can't let it drag on another month. Everybody knows that. *They* know that."

"Licked by a little outfit like Ganymede."

"If only we had more time. But we don't. The ships must be out in deep-space again, right away. If we have to capitulate to get them out, then let's do it. Ganymede!" He spat. "If we could only break them. But by that time—"

"By that time the colonies won't exist."

"We have to get our cradles back in our own hands," Groves said grimly. "Even if it takes capitulation to do it."

"No other way will do?"

"You find another way." Groves pushed past Siller, out into the corridor. "And if you find it, let me know."

THE war had been going on for two Terran months, with no sign of a break. The System Senate's difficult position came from the fact that Ganymede was the jump-off point between the System and its precarious network of colonies at Proxima Centauri. All ships leaving the System for deep-space were launched from the immense space cradles on Ganymede. There were no other cradles. Ganymede had been agreed on as the jump-off point, and the cradles had been constructed there.

The Ganymedeans became rich, hauling freight and supplies in their tubby little ships. Over a period of time more and more Gany ships took to the sky, freighters and cruisers and patrol ships.

One day this odd fleet landed among the space cradles, killed and imprisoned the Terran and Martian guards, and proclaimed that Ganymede and the cradles were their property. If the Senate wanted to use the cradles they paid, and paid plenty. Twenty per cent of all freighted goods turned over to the Gany Emperor, left on the moon. And full Senate representation.

If the Senate fleet tried to take back

the cradles by force the cradles would be destroyed. The Ganymedeans had already mined them with H bombs. The Gany fleet surrounded the moon, a little ring of hard steel. If the Senate fleet tried to break through, seize the moon, it would be the end of the cradles. What could the System do?

And at Proxima, the colonies were starving.

"You're certain we can't launch ships into deep-space from regular fields," a Martian Senator asked.

"Only Class-One ships have any chance to reach the colonies," Commander James Carmichel said wearily. "A Class-One ship is ten times the size of a regular intra-system ship. A Class-One ship needs a cradle miles deep. Miles wide. You can't launch a ship that size from a meadow."

There was silence. The great Senate chambers were full, crowded to capacity with representatives from all the nine planets.

"The Proxima colonies won't last another twenty days," Doctor Basset testified. "That means we must get a ship on the way sometime next week. Otherwise, when we do get there we won't find anyone alive."

"When will the new Luna cradles be ready?"

"A month," Carmichel answered.

"No sooner?"

"No."

"Then apparently we'll have to accept Ganymede's terms." The Senate Leader snorted with disgust. "Nine planets and one wretched little moon! How dare they want equal voice with the System members!"

"We could break their ring," Carmichel said, "but they'll destroy the cradles without hesitation if we do."

"If only we could get supplies to the colonies without using space cradles," a Plutonian Senator said.

"That would mean without using Class-One ships."

"And nothing else will reach Proxima?"

"Nothing that we know of."

A Saturnian Senator arose. "Commander, what kind of ships does Gany-mede use? They're different from your own?"

"Yes. But no one knows anything about them."

"How are they launched?"

Carmichel shrugged. "The usual way. From fields."

"Do you think—"

"I don't think they're deep-space ships. We're beginning to grasp at straws. There simply is no ship large enough to cross deep-space that doesn't require a space cradle. That's the fact we must accept."

THE Senate Leader stirred. "A motion is already before the Senate that we accept the proposal of the Ganymedeans and conclude the war. Shall we take the vote, or are there any more questions?"

No one blinked his light.

"Then we'll begin. Mercury. What is the vote of the First Planet?"

"Mercury votes to accept the enemy's terms."

"Venus. What does Venus vote?"

"Venus votes—"

"Wait!" Commander Carmichel stood up suddenly. The Senate Leader raised his hand.

"What is it? The Senate is voting."

Carmichel gazed down intently at a foil strip that had been shot to him across the chamber, from the chart wing. "I don't know how important this is, but I think perhaps the Senate should know about it before it votes."

"What is it?"

"I have a message from the first line. A Martian raider has surprised and captured a Gany Research Station, on an asteroid between Mars and Jupiter. A large quantity of Gany equipment has been taken intact." Carmichel looked around the hall. "Including a Gany ship, a new ship, undergoing tests at the Station. The Gany staff was destroyed, but the prize ship is undamaged. The raider

is bringing it here so it can be examined by our experts.

A murmur broke through the chamber.

"I put forth a motion that we withhold our decision until the Ganymedeans ship has been examined," a Uranian Senator shouted. "Something might come of this!"

"The Ganymedeans have put a lot of energy into designing ships," Carmichel murmured to the Senate Leader. "Their ships are strange. Quite different from ours. Maybe. . . ."

"What is the vote on the motion?" the Senate Leader asked. "Shall we wait until this ship can be examined?"

"Let's wait!" voices cried. "Wait! Let's see."

Carmichel rubbed his paw thoughtfully. "It's worth a try. But if nothing comes of this we'll have to go ahead and capitulate." He folded up the foil strip. "Anyhow, it's worth looking into. A Gany ship. I wonder. . . ."

DOCTOR EARL BASSETT'S face was red with excitement.

"Let me by." He pushed through the row of uniformed officers. "Please let me by." Two shiny Lieutenants stepped out of his way and he saw, for the first time, the great globe of steel and rexe-noid that was the captured Ganymedeans ship.

"Look at it," Major Siller whispered. "Nothing at all like our own ships. What makes it run?"

"No drive jets," Commander Carmichel said. "Only landing jets to set her down. What makes her go?"

The Ganymedeans globe rested quietly in the center of the Terran Experimental laboratory, rising up from the circle of men like a great bubble. It was a beautiful ship, glimmering with an even metallic fire, shimmering and radiating a cold light.

"It gives you a strange feeling," General Groves said. Suddenly he caught his breath. "You don't suppose this—this could be a gravity drive ship? The

Ganys were supposed to be experimenting with gravity."

"What's that?" Basset said.

"A gravity drive ship would reach its destination without time lapse. The velocity of gravity is infinite. Can't be measured. If this globe is—"

"Nonsense," Carmichel said. "Einstein showed gravity isn't a force but a warpage, a space warpage."

"But couldn't a ship be built using—"

"Gentlemen!" The Senate Leader came quickly into the laboratory, surrounded by his guards. "Is this the ship? This globe?" The officers pulled back and the Senate Leader went gingerly up to the great gleaming side. He touched it.

"It's undamaged," Siller said. "They're translating the control markings so we can use it."

"So this is the Ganymede ship. Will it help us?"

"We don't know yet," Carmichel said.

"Here come the think-men," Groves said. The hatch of the globe had opened, and two men in white lab uniforms were stepping carefully down, carrying a semantibox.

"What are the results?" the Senate Leader asked.

"We've made the translations. A Terran crew could operate the ship now. All the controls are marked."

"We should make a study of the engines before we try the ship out," Doctor Basset said. "What do we know about it? We don't know what makes it run, or what fuel it uses."

"How long will such a study take?" the Leader asked.

"Several days, at least," Carmichel said.

"That long?"

"There's no telling what we'll run into. We may find a radically new type of drive and fuel. It might even take several weeks to finish the analysis."

The Senate Leader pondered.

"Sir," Carmichel said, "I think we should go ahead and have a test run. We can easily raise a volunteer crew."

"A trial run could begin at once," Groves said. "But we might have to wait weeks for the drive analysis."

"You believe a complete crew would volunteer?"

Carmichel rubbed his hands together. "Don't worry about that. Four men would do it. Three, outside of me."

"Two," General Groves said. "Count me in."

"How about me, sir?" Major Siller asked hopefully.

Doctor Basset pushed up nervously. "Is it all right for a civilian to volunteer? I'm curious as hell about this."

The Senate Leader smiled. "Why not? If you can be of use, go along. So the crew is already here."

The four men grinned at each other.

"Well?" Groves said. "What are we waiting for? Let's get her started!"

THE linguist traced a meter reading with his finger. "You can see the Gany markings. Next to each we've put the Terran equivalent. There's one hitch, though. We know the Gany word for, say, five. *Zahf*. So where we find *zahf* we mark a five for you. See this dial? Where the arrow's at *nesi*? At zero. See how it's marked?"

100	liw
50	ka
5	zahf
0	nesi
5	zahf
50	ka
100	liw

Carmichel nodded. "So?"

"This is the problem. We don't know what the units refer to. Five, but five what? Fifty, but fifty what? Presumably velocity. Or is it distance? Since no study has been made of the workings of this ship—"

"You can't interpret?"

"How?" The linguist tapped a switch. "Obviously, this throws the drive on. *Mel*— start. You close the switch and it indicates *io*— stop. But how you guide the ship is a different matter. We can't tell you what the meter is for."

Groves touched a wheel. "Doesn't this guide her?"

"It governs the brake rockets, the landing jets. As for the central drive we don't know what it is or how you control it, once you're started. Semantics won't help you. Only experience. We can translate numbers only into numbers."

Groves and Carmichel looked at each other.

"Well?" Groves said. "We may find ourselves lost in space. Or falling into the sun. I saw a ship spiral into the sun, once. Faster and faster, down and down—"

"We're a long way from the sun. And we'll point her out, toward Pluto. We'll get control eventually. You don't want to unvolunteer, do you?"

"Of course not."

"How about the rest of you?" Carmichel said, to Basset and Siller. "You're still coming along?"

"Certainly." Basset was stepping cautiously into his spacesuit. "We're coming."

"Make sure you seal your helmet completely." Carmichel helped him fasten his leggings. "Your shoes, next."

"Commander," Groves said, "they're finishing on the vidscreen. I wanted it installed so we could establish contact. We might need some help getting back."

"Good idea." Carmichel went over, examining the leads from the screen. "Self-contained power unit?"

"For safety's sake. Independent from the ship."

Carmichel sat down before the vidscreen, clicking it on. The local monitor appeared. "Get me the Garrison Station on Mars. Commander Vecchi."

The call locked through. Carmichel began to lace his boots and leggings while he waited. He was lowering his helmet into place when the screen glowed into life. Vecchi's dark features formed, lean-jawed above his scarlet uniform.

"Greetings, Commander Carmichel," he murmured. He glanced curiously at Carmichel's suit. "You are going on a

trip, Commander?"

"We may visit you. We're about to take the captured Gany ship up. If everything goes right I hope to set her down at your field, sometime later today."

"We'll have the field cleared and ready for you."

"Better have emergency equipment on hand. We're still unsure of the controls."

"I wish you luck." Vecchi's eyes flickered. "I can see the interior of your ship. What drive is it?"

"We don't know yet. That's the problem."

"I hope you will be able to land, Commander."

"Thanks. So do we." Carmichel broke the connection. Groves and Siller were already dressed. They were helping Basset tighten the screw locks of his earphones.

"We're ready," Groves said. He looked through the port. Outside a circle of officers watched silently.

"Say good-by," Siller said to Basset. "This may be our last minute on Terra."

"Is there really much danger?"

Groves sat down beside Carmichel at the control board. "Ready?" His voice came to Carmichel through his phones.

"Ready." Carmichel reached out his gloved hand, toward the switch marked *mel*. "Here we go. Hold on tight!"

He grasped the switch firmly and pulled.

THEY were falling through space. "Help!" Doctor Basset shouted. He slid across the up-ended floor, crashing against a table. Carmichel and Groves hung on grimly, trying to keep their places at the board.

The globe was spinning and dropping, settling lower and lower through a heavy sheet of rain. Below them, visible through the port, was a vast-rolling ocean, an endless expanse of blue water, as far as the eye could see. Siller stared down at it, on his hands and knees, sliding with the globe.

"Commander, where—where should we be?"

"Someplace off Mars. But this can't be Mars!"

Groves flipped the brake rocket switches, one after another. The globe shuddered as the rockets came on, bursting into life around them.

"Easy does it," Carmichel said, craning his neck to see through the port. "Ocean? What the hell—"

The globe leveled off, shooting rapidly above the water, parallel to the surface. Siller got slowly to his feet, hanging onto the railing. He helped Basset up. "Okay, Doc?"

"Thanks." Basset wobbled. His glasses had come off inside his helmet. "Where are we? On Mars already?"

"We're there," Groves said, "but it isn't Mars."

"But I thought we were going to Mars."

"So did the rest of us." Groves decreased the speed of the globe cautiously. "You can see this isn't Mars."

"Then what is it?"

"I don't know. We'll find out, though. Commander, watch the starboard jet. It's overbalancing. Your switch."

Carmichel adjusted. "Where do you think we are? I don't understand it. Are we still on Terra? Or Venus?"

Groves flicked the vidscreen on. "I'll soon find out if we're on Terra." He raised the all-wave control. The screen remained blank. Nothing formed.

"We're not on Terra."

"We're not anywhere in the System." Groves spun the dial. "No response."

"Try the frequency of the big Mars Sender."

Groves adjusted the dial. At the spot where the Mars Sender should have come in there was—nothing. The four men gaped foolishly at the screen. All their lives they had received the familiar sanguine faces of Martian announcers on that wave. Twenty-four hours a day. The most powerful sender in the System. Mars Sender reached all the nine planets, and even out into deep-

space. And it was always on the air.

"Lord," Basset said. "We're out of the System."

"We're not in the System," Groves said. "Notice the horizontal curve—This is a small planet we're on. Maybe a moon. But it's no planet or moon I've ever seen before. Not in the System, and not the Proxima area, either."

Carmichel stood up. "The units must be big multiples, all right. We're out of the System, perhaps all the way around the galaxy." He peered out the port at the rolling water.

"I don't see any stars," Basset said.

"Later on we can get a star reading. When we're on the other side, away from the sun."

"Ocean," Siller murmured. "Miles of it. And a good temperature." He removed his helmet cautiously. "Maybe we won't need these after all."

"Better leave them on until we can make an atmosphere check," Groves said. "Isn't there a check tube on this bubble?"

"I don't see any," Carmichel said.

"Well, it doesn't matter. If we—"

"Sir!" Siller exclaimed. "Land."

They ran to the port. Land was rising into view, on the horizon of the planet. A long low strip of land, a coastline. They could see green; the land was fertile.

"I'll turn her a little right," Groves said, sitting down at the board. He adjusted the controls. "How's that?"

"Heading right toward it." Carmichel sat down beside him. "Well, at least we won't drown. I wonder where we are. How will we know? What if the star map can't be equated? We can take a spectroscopic analysis, try to find a known star—"

"We're almost there," Basset said nervously. "You better slow us down, General. We'll crash."

"I'm doing the best I can. Any mountains or peaks?"

"No. It seems quite flat. Like a plain."

The globe dropped lower and lower, slowing down. Green scenery whipped

past below them. Far off a row of meager hills came finally into view. The globe was barely skimming, now, as the two pilots fought to bring it to a stop.

"Easy, easy," Groves murmured. "Too fast."

ALL the brakes were firing. The globe was a bedlam of noise, knocked back and forth as the jets fired. Gradually it lost velocity, until it was almost hanging in the sky. Then it sank, like a toy balloon, settling slowly down to the green plain below.

"Cut the rockets!"

The pilots snapped their switches. Abruptly all sound ceased. They looked at each other.

"Any moment. . . " Carmichel murmured:

Plop!

"We're down," Basset said. "We're down."

They unscrewed the hatch cautiously, their helmets tightly in place. Siller held a Boris gun ready, as Groves and Carmichel swung the heavy rexenoid disc back. A blast of warm air rolled into the globe, swelling around them.

"See anything?" Basset said.

"Nothing. Level fields. Some kind of planet." The General stepped down onto the ground. "Tiny plants! Thousands of them. I don't know what kind."

The other men stepped out, their boots sinking into the moist soil. They looked around them.

"Which way? Siller said. "Toward those hills?"

"Might as well. What a flat planet!" Carmichel strode off, leaving deep tracks behind him. The others followed.

"Harmless looking place," Basset said. He picked a handful of the little plants. "What are they? Some kind of weed." He stuffed them into the pocket of his spacesuit.

"Stop." Siller froze, rigid, his gun raised.

"What is it?"

"Something moved. Through that patch of shrubbery over there."

They waited. Everything was quiet around them. A faint breeze eddied through the surface of green. The sky overhead was a clear, warm blue, with a few faint clouds.

"What did it look like?" Basset said.

"Some insect. Wait." Siller crossed to the patch of plants. He kicked at them. All at once a tiny creature rushed out, scuttling away. Siller fired. The bolt from the Boris gun ignited the ground, a roar of white fire. When the cloud dissipated there was nothing but a seared pit.

"Sorry." Siller lowered the gun shakily.

"It's all right. Better to shoot first, on a strange planet." Groves and Carmichel went on ahead, up a low rise.

"Wait for me," Basset called. He fell behind the others. "I have something in my boot."

"You can catch up." The three went on, leaving the Doctor alone. He sat down on the moist ground, grunting. He began to unlace his boot slowly, carefully.

AROUND him the air was warm. He sighed, relaxing. After a moment he removed his helmet and adjusted his glasses. Smells of plants and flowers were heavy in the air. He took a deep breath, letting it out again slowly. Then he put his helmet back on and finished lacing up his boot.

A tiny man, not six inches high, appeared from a clump of weeds and shot an arrow at him.

Basset stared down. The arrow, a minute splinter of wood, was sticking in the sleeve of his spacesuit. He opened and closed his mouth but no sounds came.

A second arrow glanced off the transparent shield of his helmet. Then a third and a fourth. The tiny man had been joined by companions, one of them on a tiny horse.

"Mother of Heaven!" Basset said.

"What's the matter?" General Groves' voice came in his earphones. "Are you

all right, Doctor?"

"Sir, a tiny man just fired an arrow at me."

"Really?"

"There's— there's a whole bunch of them, now."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"No!" Basset scrambled to his feet.

A volley of arrows rose up, sticking into his suit, glancing off his helmet. The shrill voices of the tiny men came to his ears, an excited, penetrating sound. "General, please come back here!"

Groves and Siller appeared at the top of the ridge. "Basset, you must be out of—" "

They stopped, transfixed. Siller raised the Boris gun, but Groves pushed the muzzle down. "Impossible." He advanced, staring down at the ground. An arrow pinged against his helmet. "Little men. With bows and arrows."

Suddenly the little men turned and fled. They raced off, some on foot, some on horseback, back through the weeds and out the other side.

"There they go," Siller said. "Should we follow them? See where they live?"

"It isn't possible." Groves shook his head. "No planet has yielded tiny human beings like this. So *small*!"

Commander Carmichel strode down the ridge to them. "Did I really see it? You men saw it, too? Tiny figures, racing away?"

Groves pulled an arrow from his suit. "We saw. And felt." He held the arrow close to the plate of his helmet, examining it. "Look—the tip glitters. Metal tipped."

"Did you notice their costumes?" Basset said. "In a storybook I once read. Robin Hood. Little caps, boots."

"A story. . . ." Groves rubbed his jaw, a strange look suddenly glinting in his eyes. "A book."

"What, sir?" Siller said.

"Nothing." Groves came suddenly to life, moving away. "Let's follow them. I want to see their city."

He increased his pace, walking with

great strides after the tiny men, who had not got very far off, yet.

"Come on," Siller said. "Before they get away." He and Carmichel and Basset followed behind Groves, catching up with him. The four of them kept pace with the tiny men, who were hurrying away as fast as they could. After a time one of the tiny men stopped, throwing himself down on the ground. The others hesitated, looking back.

"He's tired out," Siller said. "He can't make it."

Shrill squeaks rose. He was being urged on.

"Give him a hand," Basset said. He bent down, picking the tiny figure up. He held him carefully between his gloved fingers, turning him around and around.

"Ouch!" He set him down quickly.

"What is it?" Groves came over.

"He stung me." Basset massaged his thumb.

"Stung you?"

"Stabbed, I mean. With his sword."

"You'll be all right." Groves went on, after the tiny figures.

"Sir," Siller said to Carmichel, "this certainly makes the Ganymede problem seem remote."

"It's a long way off."

"I wonder what their city will be like," Groves said.

"I think I know," Basset said.

"You know? How?"

Basset did not answer. He seemed to be deep in thought, watching the figures on the ground intently.

"Come on," he said. "Let's not lose them."

THEY stood together, none of them speaking. Ahead, down a long slope, lay a miniature city. The tiny figures had fled into it, across a drawbridge. Now the bridge was rising, lifted by almost invisible threads. Even as they watched, the bridge snapped shut.

"Well, Doc?" Siller said. "This what you expected?"

Basset nodded. "Exactly."

The city was walled, built of gray stone. It was surrounded by a little moat. Countless spires rose up, a conglomeration of peaks and gables, tops of buildings. There was furious activity going on inside the city. A cacaphony of shrill sounds from countless throats drifted across the moat to the four men, growing louder each moment. At the walls of the city figures appeared, soldiers in armor, peering across the moat at them.

Suddenly the drawbridge quivered. It began to slide down, descending into position. There was a pause. Then—

"Look!" Groves exclaimed. "Here they come."

Siller raised his gun. "My Lord! Look at them!"

A horde of armored men on horseback clattered across the drawbridge, spilling out onto the ground beyond. They came straight toward the four spacesuited men, the sun sparkling against their shields and spears. There were hundreds of them, decked with streamers and banners and pennants of all colors and sizes. An impressive sight, on a small scale.

"Get ready," Carmichel said. "They mean business. Watch your legs." He tightened the bolts of his helmet.

The first wave of horsemen reached Groves, who was standing a little ahead of the others. A ring of warriors surrounded him, little glittering armored and plumed figures, hacking furiously at his ankles with miniature swords.

"Cut it out!" Groves howled, leaping back. "Stop!"

"They're going to give us trouble," Carmichel said.

Siller began to giggle nervously, as arrows flew around him. "Shall I give it to them, sir? One blast from the Boris gun and—"

"No! Don't fire— that's an order." Groves moved back as a phalanx of horses rushed toward him, spears lowered. He swung his leg, spilling them over with his heavy boot. A frantic mass of men and horses struggled to

right themselves.

"Back," Basset said. "Those damn archers."

Countless men on foot were rushing from the city with long bows and quivers strapped to their backs. A chaos of shrill sound filled the air.

"He's right," Carmichel said. His leggings had been hacked clean through by determined knights who had dismounted and were swinging again and again, trying to chop him down. "If we're not going to fire we better retreat. They're tough."

Clouds of arrows rained down on them.

"They know how to shoot," Groves admitted. "These men are trained soldiers."

"Watch out," Siller said. "They're trying to get between us. Pick us off one by one." He moved toward Carmichel nervously. "Let's get out of here."

"Hear them?" Carmichel said. "They're mad. They don't like us."

The four men retreated, backing away. Gradually the tiny figures stopped following, pausing to reorganize their lines.

"It's lucky for us we have our suits on," Groves said. "This isn't funny anymore."

Siller bent down and pulled up a clump of weeds. He tossed the clump at the line of knights. They scattered.

"Let's go," Basset said. "Let's leave."

"Leave?"

"Let's get out of here." Basset was pale. "I can't believe it. Must be some kind of hypnosis. Some kind of control of our minds. It can't be real."

Siller caught his arm. "Are you all right? What's the matter?"

Basset's face was contorted strangely. "I can't accept it," he muttered thickly. "Shakes the whole fabric of the universe. All basic beliefs."

"Why? What do you mean?"

Groves put his hand on Basset's shoulder. "Take it easy, Doctor."

"But General—"

"I know what you're thinking. But it can't be. There must be some rational explanation. There has to be."

"A fairy tale," Basset muttered. "A story."

"Coincidence. The story was a social satire, nothing more. A social satire, a work of fiction. It just seems like this place. The resemblance is only—"

"What are you two talking about?" Carmichel said.

"This place." Basset pulled away. "We've got to get out of here. We're caught in a mind web of some sort."

"What's he talking about?" Carmichel looked from Basset to Groves. "Do you know where we are?"

"We can't be there," Basset said.

"Where?"

"He made it up. A fairy tale. A child's tale."

"No, a social satire, to be exact," Groves said.

"What are they talking about, sir?" Siller said to Commander Carmichel. "Do you know?"

Carmichel grunted. A slow light dawned in his face. "What?"

"Do you know where we are, sir?"

"Let's get back to the globe," Carmichel said.

GROVES paced nervously. He stopped by the port, looking out intently, peering into the distance.

"More coming?" Basset said.

"Lots more."

"What are they doing out there *now*?"

"Still working on their tower."

The little people were erecting a tower, a scaffolding up the side of the globe. Hundreds of them were working together, knights, workmen, archers, even women and boys. Horses and oxen pulling tiny carts were drawing supplies from the city. A shrill hubbub penetrated the rexenoid hull of the globe, filtering to the four men inside.

"Well?" Carmichel said. "What'll we do? Go back?"

"I've had enough," Groves said. "All I want now is to go back to Terra."

"Where are we?" Siller demanded, for the tenth time. "Doc, you know. Tell me, damn it! All three of you know. Why won't you say?"

"Because we want to keep our sanity," Basset said, his teeth clenched. "That's why."

"I'd sure like to know," Siller murmured. "If we went over in the corner would you tell me?"

Basset shook his head. "Don't bother me, Major."

"It just can't be," Groves said. "How *could* it be?"

"And if we leave, we'll never know. We'll never be sure. It'll haunt us all our lives. Were we really— *here*? Does this place really exist? And is this place really—"

"There was a second place," Carmichel said abruptly.

"A second place?"

"In the story. A place where the people were big."

Basset nodded. "Yes. It was called— What?"

"Brobdingnag."

"Brobdingnag. Maybe it exists, too."

"Then you really think this is—"

"Doesn't it fit his description?" Basset waved toward the port. "Isn't that what he described? Everything small, tiny soldiers, little walled cities, oxen, horses, knights, kings, pennants. Drawbridge. Moat. And their damn towers. Always building towers—and shooting arrows."

"Doc," Siller said. "Whose description?"

No answer.

"Could—could you whisper it to me?"

"I don't see how it can be," Carmichel said flatly. "I remember the book, of course. I read it when I was a child, as we all did. Later on I realized it was a satire of the manners of the times. But good Lord, it's either one or the other! Not a real place!"

"Maybe he had a sixth sense. Maybe he really was there. Here. In a vision. Maybe he had a vision. They say that he was supposed to have been psychotic,

toward the end."

"Brobdingnag. The other place." Carmichel pondered. "If this exists, maybe that exists. It might tell us. . . . We might know, for sure. Some sort of verification."

"Yes, our theory. Hypothesis. We predict that it should exist, too. Its existence would be a kind of proof."

"The *L* theory, which predicts the existence of *B*."

"We've got to be sure," Basset said. "If we go back without being sure, we'll always wonder. When we're fighting the Ganymedeans we'll stop suddenly and wonder—was I really there? Does it really exist? All these years we thought it was just a story. But now—"

Groves walked over to the control board and sat down. He studied the dials intently. Carmichel sat down beside him.

"See this," Groves said, touching the big central meter with his finger. "The reading is up to *liw*, 100. Remember where it was when we started?"

"Of course. At *nesi*. At zero. Why?"

"*Nesi* is neutral position. Our starting position, back on Terra. We've gone the limit one way. Carmichel, Basset is right. We've got to find out. We can't go back to Terra without knowing if this really is. . . . *You know*."

"You want to throw it back all the way? Not stop at zero? Go on to the other end? To the other *liw*?"

Groves nodded.

"All right." The Commander let his breath out slowly. "I agree with you. I want to know, too. I have to know."

"Doctor Basset." Groves brought the Doctor over to the board. "We're not going back to Terra, not yet. The two of us want to go on."

"On?" Basset's face twitched. "You mean on beyond? To the other side?"

They nodded. There was silence. Outside the globe the pounding and ringing had ceased. The tower had almost reached the level of the port.

"We must know," Groves said.

"I'm for it," Basset said.

"Good," Carmichel said.

"I wish one of you would tell me what it is you're talking about," Siller said plaintively. "Can't you tell me?"

"Then here goes." Groves took hold of the switch. He held it for a moment, sitting silently. "Are we ready?"

"Ready," Basset said.

Groves threw the switch, all the way down.

SHAPES, enormous and confused.

The globe floundered, trying to right itself. Again they were falling, sliding about. The globe was lost in a sea of vague, misty forms, immense dim figures that moved on all sides of them, beyond the port.

Basset stared out, his jaws slack. "What—"

Faster and faster the globe fell. Everything was diffused, unformed. Shapes like shadows drifted and flowed outside, shapes so huge that their outlines were lost.

"Sir!" Siller muttered. "Commander! Hurry! Look!"

Carmichel made his way to the port.

They were in a world of giants. A towering figure walked past them, a torso so large that they could see only a portion of it. There were other shapes, but so vast and dim they could not be identified. All around the globe was a roaring, a deep undercurrent of sound like the waves of a monstrous ocean. An echoing sound, a booming that tossed and bounced the globe around and around.

Groves looked up at Basset and Carmichel.

"Then it's true," Basset said.

"This confirms it."

"I can't believe it," Carmichel said. "But this is the proof we asked for. Here it is—out there."

Outside the globe something was coming closer, coming ponderously toward them. Siller gave a sudden shout, moving back from the port. He grabbed up the Boris gun, his face ashen.

"Groves!" Basset cried. "Throw it

to neutral! Quick! We've got to get away."

Carmichel pushed Siller's gun down. He grinned fixedly at him. "Sorry. This time it's too small."

A hand was reached toward them, a hand so large that it blotted out the light. Fingers, skin with gaping pores, nails, great tufts of hair. The globe shuddered as the hand closed around them from all sides.

"General! Quick!"

Then it was gone. The pressure ceased, winking out. Beyond the port was—nothing. The dials were in motion again, the pointer rising up toward *nesi*. Toward neutral. Toward Terra.

Basset breathed a sigh of relief. He removed his helmet and mopped his forehead.

"We got away," Groves said. "Just in time."

"A hand," Siller said. "Reaching for us. A big hand. Where were we? Tell me!"

Carmichel sat down beside Groves. They looked silently at each other.

Carmichael grunted. "We mustn't tell anyone. No one. They wouldn't believe us, and anyhow, it would be very damaging if they did. A society can't learn something like this. Too much would totter."

"He must have seen it in a vision. Then he wrote it up as a children's story. He knew he could never put it down as fact."

"Something like that. So it really exists. Both exist. And perhaps others. Wonderland, Oz, Pellucidar, Erewhon, all the fantasies, dreams—"

Groves put his hand on the Commander's arm. "Take it easy. We'll simply tell them the ship didn't work. As far as they're concerned we didn't go anywhere. Right?"

"Right." Already, the vidscreen was sputtering, coming to life. An image was forming. "Right. We won't say anything. Just the four of us will know." He glanced at Siller. "Just the three of us, I mean."

On the vidscreen the image of the Senate Leader was fully formed. "Commander Carmichel! Are you safe? Were you able to land? Mars sent us no report. Is your crew all right?"

Basset peered out the port. "We're hanging about a mile up from the city. Terra City. Dropping slowly down. The sky is full of ships. We don't need help, do we?"

"No," Carmichel said. He began to fire the brake rockets slowly, easing the ship down.

"Someday, when the war is over," Basset said, "I want to ask the Ganymedeans about this. I'd like to find out the whole story."

"Maybe you'll get your chance," Groves said, suddenly sobered. "That's right. Ganymede! Our chance to win the war certainly fizzled."

"The Senate Leader is going to be disappointed," Carmichel said grimly. "You may get your wish very soon, Doctor. The war will probably be over shortly, now that we're back—empty-handed."

THE slender yellow Ganymedean moved slowly into the room, his robes slithering across the floor after him. He stopped, bowing.

Commander Carmichel nodded stiffly.

"I was told to come here," the Ganymedean lisped softly. "They tell me that some of our property is in this laboratory."

"That's right."

"If there are no objections, we would like to—"

"Go ahead and take it."

"Good. I am glad to see there is no animosity on your part. Now that we are all friends again, I hope that we can work together in harmony, on an equal basis of—"

Carmichel turned abruptly away, walking toward the door. "Your property is this way. Come along."

The Ganymedean followed him into the central lab building. There, resting silently in the center of the vast room,

was the globe.

Groves came over. "I see they've come for it."

"Here it is," Carmichel said to the Ganymedean. "Your spaceship. Take it."

"Our time ship, you mean."

Groves and Carmichel jerked. "Your *what*?"

The Ganymedean smiled quietly. "Our time ship." He indicated the globe. "There it is. May I begin moving it onto our transport?"

"Get Basset," Carmichel said. "Quick!"

Groves hurried from the room. A moment later he returned with Doctor Basset.

"Doctor, this Gany is after his property." Carmichel took a deep breath. "His—his time machine."

Basset leaped. "His *what*? His time machine?" His face twitched. Suddenly he backed away. "This? A time machine? Not what we—Not—"

Groves calmed himself with an effort. He addressed the Ganymedean as casually as he could, standing to one side, a little dismayed. "May we ask you a couple of questions before you take your—your time ship?"

"Of course. I will answer as best I can."

"This globe. It—it goes through time? Not space? It's a time machine? Goes into the past? Into the future?"

"That is correct."

"I see. And *nesi* on the dial, that's the present."

"Yes."

"The upward reading is the past?"

"Yes."

"The downward reading is the future, then. One more thing. Just one more. A person going back into the past would find that because of the expansion of the universe—"

The Ganymedean reacted. A smile crossed his face, a subtle, knowing smile. "Then you have tried out the ship?"

Groves nodded.

"You went into the past and found everything much smaller? Reduced in size?"

"That's right—because the universe is expanding! And the future. Everything increased in size. Expanded."

"Yes." The Ganymedean's smile broadened. "It is a shock, is it not? You are astonished to find your world reduced in size, populated by minute beings. But size, of course, is relative. As you discover when you go into the future."

"So that's it." Groves let out his breath. "Well, that's all. You can have your ship."

"Time travel," the Ganymedean said regretfully, "is not a successful undertaking. The past is too small, the future too expanded. We considered this ship a failure."

The Gany touched the globe with his feeler.

"We could not imagine why you wanted it. It was even suggested that you stole the ship to use—" the Gany smiled—"to use to reach your colonies in deep-space. But that would have been *too* amusing. We could not really believe that."

No one said anything.

The Gany made a whistling signal. A work crew came filing in and began to load the globe onto an enormous flat truck.

"So that's it," Groves muttered. "It was Terra all the time. And those people, they were our ancestors."

"About fifteenth century," Basset said. "Or so I'd say by their costumes. Middle Ages."

They looked at each other.

Suddenly Carmichel laughed. "And we thought it was— We thought we were at—"

"I knew it was only a child's story," Basset said.

"A social satire," Groves corrected him.

Silently they watched the Ganymedeans trundle their globe out of the building, onto the waiting cargo ship. ●

The

The little man who wasn't there helps out

a couple who were there all the time. . . .



The Dreamers

The little man who wasn't there helps out

a couple who were there all the time. . . .

By LU KELLA



BATHED in moonlight pouring between scudding black clouds is a toasty brown bun that is only twenty-five feet, six inches long, eight feet, three inches high and ten feet, four inches thick. Stretched invitingly in the bun is the piece of resistance—the dog—and not the tasteless mongrel type, but the juicy Great Dane breed. There's also blue electric signs that say:

FRANKIE'S FRANKIE

Link One

A roadside diner that takes the eye, eh? Now come in and give the eye to the guy who dreamed it up. Light brown hair parted neatly on the side. Slightly unstraight nose. Round pink face usually having a grin that's geared to friendly brown eyes.

Okay, so you'd rather look at what's wearing the white sandals, yellow blouse and a green skirt that don't hide too much of tanned legs. Don't forget there's also sunny hair that sweeps up from small ears and turns to curls on which sets a sassy white thingamajig that reads: FRANKIE'S FRANKIE, Link One.

Also take a gander at them lake-cool blue eyes, the set of that nose and those red lips. No, buster, you aren't the only guy wonders just who's boss of who and what, especially when she takes that thingamajig off her head at the end of her shift and says, "Frankie, honey, did you latch the counter window?"

He knows the sweet-talk covers a bitter pill. "Sure," he says, shucking off his white jacket, which also has FRANKIE'S FRANKIE, Link One, on it, and reaches for his old Air Force jacket. "Well, Mary—"

"Well, you'd better make sure." She's looking into her compact and touching her hair here and there. "The other night you forgot and in walked some old crows."

"Owls." So Frankie looks at the counter window. And clears his throat to cover up the sound of turning a latch lever. "It's locked."

"It wasn't." She's applying lipstick just-so now.

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"It wasn't." She's applying lipstick just-so now.

"So I've lost my mind." He looks hopefully at who he's lost more than his mind to. "So how's about us taking in Vera Verina in "Love Me" at the Rivoli?"

She even lets him help her with her coat before telling him. "Jake's picking me up."

"That back-stabbing pop peddler again!"

"Jake doesn't talk that way about you."

"Oh, no."

Jake's always telling me how he's afraid you won't get enough sleep every night to be on the job all day so you'll make good here."

"Ha, ha. I'm laughing."

"Oh, is that what that is?"

Frankie struggles manfully for the dignity befitting an employer and capitalist. But there's a swish of tires on gravel and headlights flash through the window. A customer, perchance?

Oh-lee, oh-lay, too-loo! A so-called musical horn tootles.

And by the interior brightness of Link One fanning into the night Frankie watches his employee skip into the long convertible and park herself beside the character at the wheel.

"Be seeing you with a load of pop, pappy!" And the District General Manager of National Carbonated Beverages, Inc., guns his buggy around, rear wheels spraying gravel at Frankie and Link One.

"Dames!" Frankie says. "*Bah.*"

The night has no answer for that, so Frankie climbs into his roadster behind Link One. He steps on the starter. Things whimper under the hood and finally the motor churns like it's got asthma. Also now, different sections of the car begin sounding like somebody's shaking a string of tin cans. Yeah, the buggy's ready to go, but where's there to go now? Frankie shuts the thing off.

IN THE grateful silence of the night Frankie eases himself off the sharp spring that keeps poking him through the seat. He also turns a knob. There's a

whining, a mess of sputtering, and from under the dashboard there's music and words. Maybe it sounds different where it begins at but the whole thing arrives here like it's being run through a loose drain pipe.

Well, when a guy's sunk every dollar he can beg, borrow and legally lay hands on into his business here, what can he expect—Vaughn Monroe in person? But at least the music's company. So Frankie sits with his head parked back on the seat. That Mary Mulvaney, he thinks. Well, there'll come a day, Miss Mulvaney!

This is only FRANKIE'S FRANKIE, Link One. Soon as this one gets going good there'll be Link Two. Then Link Three. Then Four and Five. FRANKIE'S FRANKIES—linking the country from border to border and coast to coast. Harvey did it. Johnson did it. Stanalovski can do it.

And Stanalovski won't be living in no two-by-four hole in the behind of Link One, either. I'll build a house—say seven, eight, maybe couple dozen rooms—plenty space for flowers and kids to grow good. And I'll have buggies fancier than any Jake Winer ever seen. Airplanes and yachts too. And will I go fancy-panting? Hollywood. South America—that Brazil place. France. All them places. Hobnobbing with all the other Big Shots and Fancy Janes.

Ain't this America? Where a guy can start from the bottom and hit the top?

So what? So Mary Mulvaney can't see nothing but some curly-head pop peddler with a dinky fringe under his beak.

"Know just how you feel, Frankie." Some old guy's voice—coming out the radio? "I mean you, Frankie Stanalovski."

Frankie blinks.

The old guy's voice has a kind of smile to it. "Don't think this is on the square, eh?"

"Okay, wise guy—what's the gag?"

"No gag."

"Oh, no? Then who're you and where you at?"

"Name doesn't really matter. But I can tell you where I am."

"Okay, where?"

"On the moon."

"Now listen here, bud. Can't nobody live on no moon. I read all about it in a Sunday paper once. Ain't no air up there. Besides, the sun bangs down fit to fry a horse to a cinder."

"Climate doesn't bother me."

"Aw, we're both nuts."

"Just look at the right-hand eyebrow, Frankie, of what most people call the man in the moon."

"Now I ask you—how can nobody with a naked eye see nobody that far away?" But having nothing to lose, Frankie takes a squint.

AND just like that, he's on top a mountain with some old guy who's got long white hair and whiskers and twinkly blue eyes. The guy's got an old chair with a cushion tied to the seat and back of it and just sits rocking away, comfortable as you please.

"Well, hey," Frankie says. "From the earth the moon always looks like a big fat cheese. But now that I'm up here on the thing, it really is all deserts and steep mountains of almost every color under the sun. Maybe there ain't no air. Maybe the sunlight's hot enough to fry a horse. Maybe. But I sure don't feel no burn effects, either—yet."

"And another thing. I always suspected a guy on this here moon'd be gaping down at the earth. But here I'm gandering up. It's looney, all right, but I can see everything there—oceans and continents, towns and rivers and roads—the whole shebang." And Frankie feels a puff of pride too. "Link One shows up pretty good from here too."

The old man rocks away, his chair creaking a little tune. "Can also see inside the Rainbow Gardens near your town there."

"Yeah?" Sighting on that fun place, Frankie can see inside, sure enough. Not many couples, just one that interests Frankie.

"Looks like Mary enjoys dancing with Jake," the old man says.

"Huh." Frankie watches them prancing around the juke box.

"Yep, Frankie," the old man says, "that's quite a specimen of girl."

"Unh," he grunts.

But now Mary and Jake sit at a table in one corner—and that pop peddler's shoving a diamond ring on Mary's finger!

"Dames." Frankie shuts his eyes and feels sort of sick. "Blah."

"Nice girls in Hollywood, Frankie," the old man says.

"Huh." But Frankie ganders out that way. "Hey—how come we can't see into these Hollywood joints when we could gander into Rainbow Gardens?"

"Haye to be discreet about this, Frankie. Can't poke into anyplace unless it's fitting for us to."

"Yeah? Well, how's about seeing what Vera Verina's doing now?"

"Take a look into Ciro's, Frankie."

Frankie does and just like that, he's decked out in a dress suit and parked at a table in that fancy beanery. And who's with him? Only who's ballyhooed from border to border and ocean to sea as The Every American Girl.

Yeah, Vera Verina's voice is like her eyes—deep and warm. "I'm so glad you brought me here tonight, Frankie."

Frankie don't remember nothing about that part of it. But he's mannerly. "Oh, it ain't nothing."

Nothing? Vera's wearing her pale blonde hair long. Her face is everything the close-ups at the Rivoli say it is. And her figure in that dress she's wearing—Frankie knows if he sits here doing nothing but look another minute he'll bust a gasket.

So he says, "Maybe we should dance, hey?"

"Anything *you* want, Frankie."

So they dance. But Vera's perfume, the way she holds Frankie so close to her, the way she looks into his eyes—

"Oh, brother," Frankie whispers to himself.

"I," Vera whispers in his ear, "think

we've danced enough, don't you?"

"Yeah," Frankie says and runs a finger between his collar and neck. What it's safest to do next he don't know.

But Vera tucks her hand under his arm like she owns him now. "Take me home, Frankie."

"Yeah." Ain't a guy supposed to take a dame home after having her out? "Sure," Frankie says and finds his way out of the place and into a hack that's waiting.

Vera's hand finds his and don't let go. "What are you thinking, Frankie?"

Thoughts are flapping through Frankie's mind like the colored lights zipping past the hack windows. What's he thinking?

"This is it, Mac," the hack driver's voice says like gravel rolling.

And Frankie don't have to tell what he's thinking—yet. But he ain't out of this deal by a long shot.

WITH a wink, the hackie swooshes away in the night and Frankie's left alone with Vera's fingers feeling like live electric wires on his arm and her saying soft at him, "A night to remember, Frankie."

"Yeah." Frankie's feet take him up to Vera's door. It's kind of shadowy there and perfumy.

Vera stands looking at him with a little smile. "Hello, Frankie."

"Hello?" Then somebody seems to give Frankie a darn good push.

Well, Vera's kissing him like at the Rivoli. Only it ain't like at the Rivoli. It's like a hot-foot starting at Frankie's toes and gaining speed as it goes up. Arriving at his poor brain, it just knocks the top of his head out.

"Well, Frankie," the old man's voice says, "how was that?"

Frankie opens his eyes. Yeah, he's back on the moon, no fancy dress suit, just old slacks and jacket again.

Frankie considers the old man's question. "Oh, I guess Vera's okay—for some guys."

"She's supposed to represent every

American girl, Frankie."

"American dames." Frankie thinks of a certain one employed by him. "Huh."

"Hmmm." The old man rocks a bit and squints over the earth. Part of Europe's coming around now. The old man nods in the direction of the Mediterranean. "There on the Riviera."

"So what?"

"So on the beach near Cannes. Mimi in the polka-dot suit."

"Well, now—" Just like that, he's parked there on the sand with the sun warm on his pale back.

Well Mimi has dark hair fluffing about tan shoulders on one end and little red-nailed toes on the other end, and all the scenery in between's the kind that's been in favor since Eve fixed Adam. Yeah, Vera Verina made Frankie's bashful heart turn somersaults, but Mimi is making it stand on its head and spin around on one ear.

Then Mimi jumps up and in a tickling voice says something which, with a roll of big blue eyes, ends in, "Frankie!"

It sure sounds interesting. So Frankie jumps up too. But with a laughing squeal that ends in that, "Frankie!" again, Mimi runs and dives head on into a big breaker.

"Oh, I can't eh?" Frankie says and splashes himself in the sea after her.

Mimi comes up. Frankie comes up for air. Mimi dives. Frankie hauls in air and dives. Mimi turns this way and that like a fish. But not for nothing was Frankie on the third-string swim team at Center-vale High. Down through the cold green deep he goes and finally grabs one of them kicking ankles.

But he ain't particularly planned on what happens right after that. Mimi twists over, to try to escape—maybe. So Frankie grabs for a better hold. Maybe he don't get one but Mimi does. Her arms clamp around his neck, and when her lips also latch hold of his there in the deep—

Well, the guy just feels like a boiler with its safety valve jammed so that the pressure shoots up to where only one

thing can happen. Bam! And Frankie's spinning away through blue-green steam and a shower of colored lights.

"Well?" the old man's asking.

Yeah, just like that, Frankie's back on the moon, in his old slacks and jacket, dry as you please beside the old man's chair.

"Oh, Mimi's some dame," Frankie admits. "Only. . ."

"Only what now?"

"Only who knows what she's really saying with that, 'Frankie!' business?"

"Hmmm." The old man rocks to and fro and takes a squint down South America way. "Brazil, Frankie. Rio."

Always having had an eye for Carmen Miranda, Frankie looks too. "Yeah, pop?"

"The Copa Club. Señorita in the white dress."

Frankie whistles.

"Chi-Chi is her name." The old man smiles slightly. "And she knows English—among other things."

Frankie takes it from there.

Or rather Chi-Chi takes Frankie from there. "Aye-yi-yi! Frankie-Frankie! Let's samba!"

"Sure, why not?"

NOW, the orchestra's hammering its drums and rattling its dried punkins. Its guitars and marimbas are hitting along too. This South American music always did make Frankie's blood get up and go. Also, he's swinging out with this Chi-Chi. And this Chi-Chi dame's got everything Carmen Miranda has on top of everything good Vera Verina and Mimi has.

Now the samba as she is did down in Rio is, as Frankie's finding out, a combination of a speedboat ride through a tunnel of love, wrestling on a roller coaster and riding a runaway merry-go-round. Frankie's breathing hard but determined to stay the limit, though. He lopes around and spins Chi-Chi and she lopes around and whirls him. She kisses him as she flies in and she smooches him again as she yanks him back.

"Aye-yi-yi!" she says. "Frankie-Frankie! Forever with you I can samba like this!"

Forever, she says. Frankie-Frankie's feet are smoking. His ears are bonging like bells to the tune the whole place has picked up from Chi-Chi. "Aye-yi-yi! Frankie-Frankie! Aye-yi-yi!"

And still this samba of the sambas goes faster and faster and on and on and everybody else seems to become fresher and fresher as Frankie's legs become rubberier and rubberier and his breathing turns to something that sounds like air sizzling out of a tire going flat.

"Aye-yi-yi! Frankie-Frankie! Aye-yi-yi!"

Aye-yi-yi. Frankie just quietly finds the floor and lets the fog roll over him.

"Well, Frankie?"

Spread like a rug on the rock beside the old chair, Frankie just fans himself with the tail of the old man's robe. The old man sighs.

Frankie feels mighty low too. "Guess there just ain't no dame on earth for me, pop."

The old man rocks slowly to and fro. He sighs again and peers off in another direction, way off at a bright red star. "That garden over there, Frankie. Just a bit below Mars' north pole."

Frankie finds that looking to Mars ain't no harder than looking to earth. "Yeah, pop?"

"Sitting under that tree. Name's Nita."

Well, Nita's got sort of golden hair that she wears in a strange way. She's got a face like a princess and eyes like mysterious green pools. From the ears down she's wearing soft, blonde, feathery fur that she grows herself, looks like. Oh, she's also wearing a few pieces of fancy gear here and there.

And as Frankie parks beside her on the mossy slope her voice reminds him of a slowly strummed harp. "Have a loo-loo, Frankie," she urged.

She reaches up to a tree that makes Frankie think of an overgrown yellow

skeleton of an old umbrella strung with red and green Christmas-tree balls.

Nita plucks a green ball and gives it to him. "You'll love loo-loos, Frankie. Everybody around here eats nothing else for breakfast, lunch and supper."

The thing smells something like a cross between a cantaloupe and a peach. So Frankie takes a bite. What it really tastes like, Frankie don't know; he's never eat such a thing before. So naturally one bite don't give no score.

Meanwhile, Nita's breath is like perfume on his cheek as she pokes her fingers through his hair to see has he more than just the two eyes in the front of his face—she herself having a spare parked in the back of her fancy dome. As usual, though, Frankie's rigged out according to the style of the company he's with. Maybe Nita feels comfortable in that get-up of hers. But Frankie wishes he was wearing more than just a fancy skirt-like rig around the axles. After all, it's a bit chilly here on Mars and he ain't growed no fur suit on himself to keep the goosebumps from running around.

Nita rubs her cheek against his. "Frankie with only two eyes like Nita with three eyes?"

"Yeah." Frankie smothers a small burp. "Sure."

"Nita with three eyes like Frankie with only two eyes." She snuggles closer to him. "Very much, Nita with three eyes like Frankie with only two eyes."

"Yeah." Frankie with only two eyes feels sort of queer. "Yeah, that's all right." He also decides he better not eat the rest of this loo-loo thing.

"Frankie with only two eyes want to kiss Nita with three eyes? Hm-m-m-m-m?"

"Uh—urp." The guy's took a boat ride once and wasn't a very good sailor then. So he sort of knows now.

"Frankie with only two eyes—you are turning green as a loo-loo." Nita stares at his puss with all her eyes. "What on Mars is the matter with you?"

"I—urp." He stands up fast.

"Frankie with only two eyes! Come back to Nita with three eyes!"

Frankie with he don't care how many eyes nobody has only gallops on up the slope and over the hill.

IN TIME Frankie finds himself back on the moon and laid out beside the old man's chair.

"Well, Frankie?"

"Nita ain't so bad, spare peeper and all—I guess." Frankie rests a hand gently where his stomach is. "But them loo-loos." Frankie closes his two eyes. "Pop—ain't nobody on earth built to handle them things."

The old man sighs.

Frankie tries to keep his voice from shaking. "Pop—there just ain't no other dame like Mary no place in Creation."

The chair squeaks softly as the old guy just rocks away.

Frankie puts his hands over his own puss. "She's gone and I just don't know what to do or nothing."

The old man says quiet like, "Got a pretty good thing in Link One. Can dig in and work it up into a string, Frankie."

Frankie, though, feels like a starved pup lost a million miles from home. "But the house with all the rooms and flowers and kids and . . . aw, nuts." He ain't bawled since a kid. But he makes up for it now. His tears come squirting up through his fingers over his map like small spouters from a leaky garden hose and fall back down on him.

The old man pats him on the shoulder. "Oh, Frankie, Frankie."

But Frankie's tears are sopping himself from head to foot now.

And the old man's voice changes. "Frankie, can't you hear me?" Also Frankie's being shook fit to rattle his brain loose.

Frankie blinks, not only because that ain't the old man's voice and somebody's shining a light in his pan, but also because water's banging down on him by the wash-tub full. And when he does see who's yammering, "Frankie what's the matter with you!" at him, he mumbles dizzily, "It's you?"

"Yes it's me—you brainless infant!"

Her raincape's streaming with water in the reflection of the flashlight she's waving around. "And what's the idea sleeping out here in your jalopy in the rain!"

"I was not sleeping in no rain."

"Oh shut up and come on!" And she yanks him out of the soggy seat.

Frankie feels like a bad kid being led home by his mamma. "Well, gee whiz—"

"Give me the keys!"

"Keys?"

"Never mind you went off and left them in the lock again!" So she opens the door, snaps on the light and hauls him into the dry inside of Link One. Tossing off her cape and coat, she turns on him with blue eyes snapping. "Now start taking those clothes off!"

"Yes, ma'am." Frankie peels off his jacket and stands watching her light the grill to warm the place up.

She looks up. "I said take off your clothes!"

"But—"

"Oh, sit down!"

Frankie sits and says with what dignity he has left, "Miss Mulvaney, this ain't no way for no employer and employee to act—"

She yanks off his squishy shoes and soggy sox and says, "Stand up!"

Frankie stands. "Especially when the employee of us is going to marry a pop peddler with a—"

"Take off those pants!"

"Miss Mulvan—"

"And put on my coat!" She hands it to him and turns her lovely back.

"But, Miss Mul—"

SHE whirls with blue eyes flashing sparks and wonderful mouth still going ninety miles a second. "I am not marrying any two-timing, double-crossing, three-faced jackass—and if you don't get those old wet pants off I'll take them off myself, and do you want to die of pneumonia or something?" She whirls and stands with her back to him again.

Frankie just blinks like he's been slapped in the map with a fresh fish. "Hey—you ain't marrying Jake?"

"Are you getting out of those wet clothes and into my coat or not?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"All right, then." Her voice is kind of trembly for just a second. "I had a dream last night or this night or something."

"Hah. You had a dream."

"Shut up and listen. I dreamed you fell asleep in your car out here and went to see an old man on the moon and the old man showed you Vera Verina and a French Mimi and a South American Chi-Chi and even a Nita on Mars and you went to see them and got kissed and fed up and couldn't stand any of them near as much as me and so you began crying all over the moon and you'd never try to be anything without me and that's when I jumped out of bed and took my sister Cissie's car and ran out here and dragged you in out of the rain and have you got my coat on yet?"

Her coat buttoned like a long skirt around himself, Frankie gapes at her back. "You mean you seen all that?"

"Oh, it was only a dream and dreams aren't real are they and you'd never in a million years have gumption enough to do anything like all that but—" and she turns, sees the look on him, and she's like she's going to explode into crying.

Well, that's when Frankie finally gets gumption enough to do what he's always wanted to do—wrap her in his arms and show her what he means.

But that mouth of her's going lickety-split again. "Oh Frankie you're not a hopeless dope after all and we'll build the FRANKIES into a chain with Links everyplace and have a house with flowers and kids and every—uhp-mmmmm? Mmmmmmmmm."

Now you explain it. The guy's had some kind of experience kissing and being necked by the most high-charged dames on earth and Mars. But this—no, this don't blow nobody's head out or scatter nobody all over the place. This is comfortable. Like resting in a garden with the sun warm and the air cool and the flowers sweet—and good dogs sizzling on the grill.



Illustration by
S. VIDBERG

He braced himself with both hands on a pressure wheel

MOON DUST

By OLIVER SAARI

*He was the first man there,
and found the Moon
was the stuff that
dreams are made of . . .*

COME in, Jessup. . . Come in, Jessup. . ." the voice said over and over.

He reached out blindly to push it away until the tearing pain in his side cleared his mind of smothering fog.

"I . . . I . . ." he croaked.

The voice droned on unheeding for an interminable time, then:

"Jess!" it deafened him "Hey, Colonel! I've got him! He's alive! Jess—"

The voice of Colonel Markley broke in, "What happened, Jessup?" Then there was a deathly silence, a *waiting*.

"I . . . I don't know," said Jessup. "It's dark out there—the bull's-eye's dark. Or maybe I can't see—"

He checked his voice as he sensed its rising pitch. His groping hand found the emergency switch, and the panel lights came on before him like round eyes in the dark.

"Jessup, what's wrong?" roared the colonel's voice. "You've been silent for an hour. We watched you land, but lost you and now we can't see you. Where are you?"

He asked himself the question, and the answer trickled slowly into his mind. . . *I'm in a very small, padded place. My head and side hurt like fire. All I can see are those owl-eyed dials. . .*

There should be more to see than that.

His hand next felt what his eyes now saw: the plastiglass gleam of the bull's-eye only a few inches from his face. Beyond the transparency was a darkness like the bottom of a mine.

"I don't know where I am, Colonel," he said finally. "It's dark outside. I must have gone over the terminator."

He could sense the colonel waiting like a trapped hawk. There was only a three-second time-lag, but it seemed like more. It had made itself felt, like a growing sense of distance, all the way from the Station.

"You didn't cross over," insisted Markley's voice. "We saw you land a hundred miles safe in sunlight. Can't you even see the stars?"

The stars! Jessup strained his face toward the little round hole of transparency, and yet he saw nothing. He felt strange, idiotic words rising: "Someone's painted it black—I fell in a puddle of ink—"

"What's that?" shouted the colonel. "In God's name, man, talk sense!"

"I must have landed in a big shadow and fallen over," said Jessup. "That's why it's dark."

"Apparently you lit on your head," rasped Markley. "Look—pull yourself together! You're not in any shadow. You skimmed right into daylight in the middle of Nubium."

"You saw me land!" cried Jessup eagerly. "How did it look from up there?"

"You went down from the West," said the colonel, speaking fast. "Your jets started over the Altai Range. You sailed over Regio, apparently pretty high, and slanted in toward the edge of Pitatus. Your jets blinked out just about fifty miles north of that. That's all we saw."

"One of the steering vanes blew and she was going to spin—I had to cut the jets too high," said Jessup, his mind clearing rapidly. "Wait a minute, Colonel, I'll see what gives."

THERE was another interval of silence, underscored by the sound of his own labored breathing. He explored his body with his hands and found many sore spots but no obvious fractures. He loosened the harness and put his feet on the floor, bracing himself with his hands against the sides of the tiny cabin. He stood there for a minute, swaying, before he realized what was wrong.

The floor was *down*.

That meant the ship was resting on her tail structure. And so the bull's-eye above his head should have gleamed with cold stars and fiery sunlight!

He placed his hand against the tiny window and clicked on his wristlight. The inner and outer surfaces of the transparency glared back in double reflection. On the outside was a sooty deposit, like a greyish something dipped in candle smoke.

"First things first," he muttered aloud and started scanning the instruments.

The chronometer showed that Markley had exaggerated: he'd been out only ten minutes. And he was losing air!

Sickeningly he visualized the mess that must be down below, the jets and undercarriage smashed and twisted. . . Then Markley's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes, yes, I see it—" the colonel was shouting at someone on the other end. Then his voice became low, hesitant, "Jess—we may have something here. . . I'm looking at a photo of the spot you went down. I don't see your rocket, but there's a—a—uh, *pit* that looks different from the rest of the smallpox. Like a dent in a hill of sand. I'm afraid to say what it might mean!"

So that was it. Sand—no, volcanic ash! Of course they had known that parts of the moon would be covered with it. What they hadn't known—what even the Space Station's telescopes hadn't been able to tell them—was how *soft* the stuff was, and how *deep*. Jessup felt an ancient horror clutching at him—a horror that should have been totally foreign to the vast sweep of space.

He was buried alive.

"Like a stone in a puddle of mud," said Markley gloomily to White, the Station's Second. "Maybe we ought to be thankful; the stuff probably saved his life!"

"Saved him! What for, if he can't get out?"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders, his face an expressionless mask for his thoughts. White could sense the tortured anxiety of the older man. More than anyone, he had worked for and pushed Project Moon. He'd never really been a military man. Space was his driving mania. He'd risen to General once, but had been busted for plugging his conviction too hard. . . And now—in the penultimate moment—this!

"How deep could he be and still send?" Markley asked of the man with the earphones.

"His signal's weak and distorted. Antenna might be damaged or partly under. At that, I don't know if a few feet of that dust would stop shortwave—"

"Might be fifteen feet," muttered

Markley, his face gray and tired-looking. "God! Maybe he's still sinking!"

"Sir, we don't *know* that he's that deep," cautioned White. "I don't see how an impact could bury him like that."

"What do we know of the conditions?" moaned the colonel. "That stuff must be absolutely dry—and loosely packed. In the light gravity it probably flows like water—quicksand! I should have thought of it—"

"Jessup wants to know if there are any orders, sir," said the radioman.

The question might have been phrased with a semi-humorous bitterness, but the colonel answered seriously:

"Tell him to give us an estimate to the damage. Ask him if he thinks he can blast out."

As the radio man spoke into the microphone, White was suddenly struck with the irony of the situation. Here was the historic moment: they were talking to the first man on the moon. And what did it mean? Where was the thrilling revelation, the sense of triumph? A poor, blind man, buried under a mountain of dust. . .

"Jessup says he can't tell much yet about the ship," said the radioman. "He says to hold on."

"We'll be out of beam range in fifteen minutes," said Markley hollowly; his heavy shoulders hunched forward as if he were trying to reach his arms out to the sunken rocket.

White felt the same helplessness. They could not even stop the Station in its hurtling chase around the Earth. Soon the Moon would be lost from sight behind the vast, misty mass of the planet.

He became aware of the New Mexico beep-call, sounding furiously. He picked the phone up and listened to the angry, excited voice at the other end. Muttering an abject, unmeant apology, he handed the phone to Markley, who made an expression of distaste.

"Yes, General. . . we're going out of range soon—can you hear him down

there? . . . No! He didn't crack up. He's buried . . . we can't tell yet . . . yes, buried in the ash—volcanic ash or meteor dust, I don't know. . . *I don't know* . . . yes, General . . . yes, sir!"

He slammed the receiver down.

"Do they get him at all?" asked White anxiously.

"Only a word here and there. They're going to try and clear the air a bit—widen his channel—put a crimp in somebody's T.V. If I hear one complaint, I'm dropping a bomb!"

WE'RE going out of range now," said Markley's voice in the earphones. "They hear you down below. Keep sending. And—*good luck!*"

Other voices in the background echoed, "Good luck, Jess!"

He had a vision of the Station's silver disc falling behind the bulging Earth as the voices quivered into silence. He stood there for a while, steadying himself with both hands braced on a pressure wheel.

"Think," he said aloud, reading from an absurd little cardboard sign in his mind.

And immediately he thought of the leak in the hull. What a stupid thing to forget!

Already the air-pressure gauge glowed a warning red.

With a swift, trained motion he poked the smoke button. White tendrils burst out and swirled eerily in the dim light. He watched anxiously as they converged near his feet and vanished, riding invisible currents of escaping air. There he found a bulge in the tough duralumin wall, evidence of a broken stanchion.

Quickly he broke out a rubberoid seal pad and slammed it into place over the hole, pressing the edges firmly. . . . Again he pushed the smoke button, and this time the streamers hung uncertainly about. He found there were no more leaks!

He drew a deep lungful of the precious air and felt his muscles relaxing

. . . and felt a sudden, joyous hope. Since the welded seams of the cabin had held, perhaps even the power plant down below was intact. He had plenty of nuclear fuel; he needed only to get down there to repair the steering vanes, to refill the exhaust-mass tanks with the moon's abundant material. Accidents had been provided for: there was the radiation-shielded pressure suit, crammed into the tiny but adequate airlock. . . . He had a vision of himself in it, battling the dust like a lunatic.

But could he get out at all?

If he opened the lock, would he be able to dig his way out? Or would the dust flow in, faster than he could push it back? It might jam the door mechanism, flow in around him. . . .

There was a rustling gabble in his earphones, many voices speaking at once. Now one choice came through more clearly as he clicked up the volume.

" . . . Can you hear us, Jessup? New Mexico speaking. . . Can you hear us? Answer, please, answer. . . ."

He felt an overwhelming surge of relief.

"Yes!" he cried. "Yes! This is Jessup!"

He repeated it over and over, deafened himself shouting it, until an excited voice answered, "Thank God! We've finally cleared the air. We get you now. Are you all right? Can we help you? The world is with you. . . ." Interference howled. Rising and falling, another voice intoned: "Do not despair and turn away from God!"

"Think, think—"

He slammed his hand against the helmet and the voices ceased.

"Think," he said again.

What he actually meant was "act." *He had to do something.* The first thing, of course, was to get out of the ship. He could not go down into the radiation-infested hull from the inside. Repairs on the ship's structure, if needed, had to be done from the outside; he had the tools. . . .

JESSUP examined the darkened port-hole again, peering at the dust. Most of the particles were too fine to be seen separately. The residue of uncounted billions of shattered meteorites, fine as face-powder. The stuff could be a foot thick above him, or ten! The fact that it was so fine meant that this was the lighter portion, the skim. The heavier particles must have settled lower in the sifting process of a million windless eons. Heaven knew how deep it was below him!

In panic at the smothering darkness he threw a switch, flooding the cabin with light.

He felt a fierce desire to feel the moon dust in his hands, to grasp at any hope it might offer. There was a safe way. The tiny sample-corer had been meant for the moon's rocks and minerals, but it whirled eagerly in his hands as he pushed it into the duralumin wall. The rush of air into the hole made a wet, sucking sound. Slamming a seal-pad into place, he examined the tool in his hand.

The end of the core-drill was filled with dust. Carefully he shook the particles into his hand. He stared at them a long time, foolishly. They weren't much to see: a few blackish, slippery-feeling grains like pulverized coal.

Was this what he had come for? In the tense haste of landing, he'd barely seen the sunlit mountains, the panorama of glare and shadow above. Was this little handful of dust to be what he had lived—and most probably given—his life for?

He flung it violently against the wall. The motion sent scathing pain into his bruised side.

"Cut out the self-pity!" he yelled aloud.

Suppressing an impulse to cry out, he banged his helmet again and made the clear, welcome voice from New Mexico come floating back.

"... What happened, Jessup? What's wrong? We don't hear you! Answer... Answer. . . ."

WHY don't you try to get a little sleep, sir," said White. "We won't be in range for an hour yet."

Markley was slumped before the Com-panel, his hands in his pockets. His face was pasty white, the stubble sticking out on it like hoar frost.

"Listen to this," he said, holding up a hand. The radio before him spoke with a smooth announcer's voice:

"Colonel Markley of the Space Station says that every effort is being made to assist Lieutenant Robert Jessup, the first man on the moon. Rescue is still out of the question, but Jessup appears to be in good spirits. He is acting on expert advice, but Colonel Markley says that suggestions from any source will be considered. If anything in your experience can help Bob Jessup, get in touch with your nearest radio or television station—*now!*"

"Hm-m. Expect anything?" asked White.

"No."

"Then why—?"

"It keeps them interested," said Markley.

"Interested! Surely—"

"Surely nothing!" cried Markley with a strange, wild emphasis. "Do you know why we weren't on the moon ten years ago? The techniques we're using now have been known a good deal longer than that."

"It was the cost—"

"It was the public," snapped Markley bitterly. "The fickle old public. There was a time when the idea of space travel was a fad, when the rockets boomed in every Sunday supplement. We could have had plenty of backing then. But we weren't ready then—by quite a few years. We had to build the Space Station first."

"But that was a military necessity—"

"And a financial calamity—but the public had to swallow it! And maybe because they had to—because of our lithium bombs and the nervous tension of the war that never did come—the pendulum swung the other way! Now the

moon-ship's a different matter."

"But there was plenty of interest—"

"To the average man, the moon's still made of green cheese!" shouted Markley, waving a hand for emphasis. "Oh, he can quote figures he's read—he can tell you how far it is, how big it is. But he doesn't really connect those figures with the moon out there! He doesn't *feel* what it is!"

White knew what the colonel meant. He himself had experienced a peculiar change of viewpoint on coming to the Space Station. Call it a change in Cosmic Perspective.

"You can't blame them if they lose interest a little," he said lamely. "It's been nothing but moon, moon in the news for years now. When Jessup landed, they had a right to expect something exciting. This thing is a terrible anti-climax."

"They expected the moon brought home to them, I suppose," sighed Markley. "Pictures, descriptions—that sort of thing. All they've got now is a dud firecracker. A small boy on a New York street can see more of the moon than Bob Jessup."

"You talked to him last. How was he?"

Markley shook his head, slowly, tiredly.

"His battery was running low. He hasn't tried to get out yet—says he thinks the dust will jam the lock, and maybe he's right. Maybe he'd better wait for those suggestions!"

For the hundredth time, White turned Jessup's problem over in his mind. He always thought of it as Jessup's problem, never having been able to identify himself with the midget-sized fanatic who had boarded the moon-ship. Markley, he knew, had envied the pilot like a shipwrecked sailor envies the free-winged albatross—but not he! That did not mean he didn't want to help. He felt the same desperate longing to help that people have always felt for submarine crews who vainly tap their calls for help on the sides of their

sunken vessels—for buried well-diggers, or miners caught by cave-ins. But what could he—what could anyone—do?

"I wonder what he's doing now," said White softly.

JESSUP lay in soft darkness, quiescent. He was in the Airlock. Rivulets of sweat ran down his prone body inside the pressure suit and the incoming air was an icy sword in his back. For forty hours now the rocket's cabin had been growing warmer as the unseen sun above blazed on the dust. He had turned off the friendly chug-chug of the air conditioner to conserve power, and the heat was becoming unbearable.

What was it he had to do? Was it better than roasting alive? Oh, well—

He kicked clumsily at the pedal which actuated the outer door of the airlock. The door plug scraped unpleasantly on his metal boots as it slid aside.

Push . . . kick . . . The legs moved stiffly, like pipe joints. He reached above his head with the suit's clumsy arms and pushed. Slowly the suit scraped outward. He could feel only a soft, yielding resistance on his feet. A wild hope rose within him. Perhaps the dust was loosely-packed tenuous enough to tunnel through!

Then he was running in a waking nightmare. Running in molasses. A soft, yielding *something* was flowing around his feet—deadly, smothering stuff unseen in the pitch darkness. Panic seized him as first one leg and then the other became stuck fast.

Desperately he waved his arms until the suit's mechanical hands caught on the handwheel of the inner door. His wet palms slipped on the manipulators as he tried to apply pressure, to turn the wheel which refused to move.

He put every ounce of his strength into his arms—and gradually the wheel began to turn. Slowly at first, and then in a rush, the door plug moves aside.

He clung to the handwheel as an unseen force pushed down at him. Suddenly he felt his legs come free, as the

cabin's outrushing air forced back the dust!

When the pressure lessened, he managed to squeeze the bulky suit through the inner door and into the now airless cabin; he fought the door back into place.

Safe!

Relief was as overwhelming as his panic had been. He stood there for a full minute, feeling nothing but joy and thankfulness that the dust could not come in after him. Then the sting of sweat flowing down his forehead and into his eyes swiftly brought him back to reality.

Safe, indeed!

For what?

He had hoped against reason that he could tunnel through the dust to the surface.

Perhaps he would soon have roasted to death in the sunlight, but he would at least have stood on the moon. The *real* moon—not this coffin where he was already dead and buried.

But wasn't he on the moon? Wasn't this what he had wanted, all his life? Wasn't this what he had come for?

What had he come for?

It was a question he had never really asked himself in the proper light, with the proper urgency. Others had asked it: "That crazy Jessup! I wouldn't be in his boots for a million bucks. . . . What does he want to go to the moon for? What good's the moon?" The men who had said those things had been right, of course. He *was* crazy. And the question would never be answered—from their viewpoint. For them the moon was just an ornament—a beautiful ornament in the summer sky.

It was strange that he'd never been in a position where he had to think out his reasons for coming on the moon ship. He'd been too busy fighting for the chance to wonder just why he wanted it.

Markley was like him, of course. He wondered if the colonel would trade places with him right now. . . . maybe he would, at that!

Ever since he'd been a kid, Bob Jessup had wanted the moon. Not for himself, so much—but for the others. It had been a deep hurt when he met others who didn't want it at all—who didn't even seem to know it was there. To him it was a symbol of the Greater Reality—a stepping stone to the stars.

His body sagged under the weight of an overwhelming longing—not to be back on earth, but to go forward, *to show the way.*

And suddenly he saw the blinding simplicity of the answer. . . .

IT'S only a paper moon. . . . hanging over a cardboard sea. . . .

"The moon's still in the news," said White softly, as the strains of the old song floated over the Station's bridge.

"They're dancing to it," said Markley with an irrational bitterness. "While he's still alive out there. . . ."

"Do you suppose we'll still be able to receive him? You said his batteries were just about gone."

"We'll soon know."

The radio man stuck his head into the room.

"I've focused on Nubium, sir—just out of the horizon."

Markley started droning into the microphone:

"Jessup! Jessup! Come in! Come in! . . . Yes! . . . Yes! . . ."

To White the time seemed endless until Markley turned and said: "His air's gone! He tried to get out and couldn't. He's speaking through the communicator hookup of his suit and I can barely hear him. . . ."

Suddenly the colonel stiffened.

"Yes! Yes! I hear you!" he shouted. "You're what? . . . But that's crazy! . . . No! I order you not to—"

He tore the earphones from his head and dived for the tube leading to the radome.

White exchanged puzzled glances with the other two men watching, and then followed.

Markley was at the telescope, crank-

ing handwheels, swinging the tube on its airtight joint. The large quartz port showed the moon, nearly full, just rising from the misty horizon. The instant White turned his eyes on it he saw the flash.

THE searing, blue-white fire was like a glimpse of the sun. Then, from the tip of Mare Imbrium, from the mouth of that ancient pock-marked face, rose a bright plume of smoke.

"My God!" cried White. "He's blown himself up!"

Quite perceptibly the plume widened, its jet-black shadow crossing the moon's face like a sword-cut. Gradually it thickened at the top, still rising like a shining fountain in the sunlight. It was beautiful, but with a beauty surpassed for White by its horror.

"Why did he do it?" he groaned, trying to understand.

The spectacle possessed him even as he struggled against it. This was the moon ship, all their work going up in a cloud of atomic dust! This was the accident they had all feared—and it hadn't been an accident!

Why?

Markley looked at him with a face that was old, but with eyes that were strangely bright and proud.

"If you don't know why, when you look at that," he said slowly, "you'll never know."

Then, stung to anger by White's blank face, he shouted, "Don't you see? He had to do *something*!"

Then, suddenly, White understood. Men like Markley and Jessup had fought against the indifference of men like himself for hundreds of years. Theirs was not a personal ambition. The buried moon ship had been a deadly fizzle, a "so-what," a tainted success. *This* was a spectacle a billion people would see and feel—a miracle!

The man-made tree grew where nothing had ever grown before, its branches thickening and spreading, hiding the moon's face like a tantalizing veil. ●

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The goldfish bowl showered him with fish, water and splinters of glass

IF AT FIRST by BILL VENABLE

MISTER 8 took the small, gray box from his pocket. Smiling, he handed it to Mr. 7.

"Wait!" exclaimed Shalimar Smith.

"Sorry," said Mr. 7, pressing the red button on the right-hand side of the box.

Shalimar Smith disappeared from the room.

"An excellent plan, indeed," commented Mr. 1.

Messrs. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 nodded agreement and muttered among themselves.

"And now," pursued Mr. 7, "Stage Two." He pressed the green button on the left-hand side of the gray box.

The Messrs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 also disappeared from the room.

Shalimar Smith's living room stood empty.

Immediately after Mr. 7 had pressed the red button on the right-hand side of the gray box, Shalimar Smith found himself sitting comfortably in a reclining seat on a fast-moving train. After contemplating the sudden transition and

A Spaceship — and a Personality — Get Lost in an Alien Shuffle

making himself thoroughly dizzy, he turned in some alarm to considering where he was going. He peered out the window, trying to make something from the mixture of blackness and lights spinning by, overlaid by stationary reflections from inside the car.

"Your ticket, sir," said the conductor for the second time.

"Eh—oh!" Shalimar looked up, felt in the breast pocket of his coat for a ticket that was not there. "Here it—" he pulled the pocket inside out—"isn't," he finished lamely.

"That's nice," said the conductor sarcastically.

Shalimar groaned and dug into his other pockets, distributing their contents over the seat. Finally he gave a cry of jubilation, pulled his hand from his inside coat pocket and handed the conductor a small square of cardboard.

The conductor punched three heart-shaped holes through Shalimar's name and handed him back his driver's license. Shalimar gazed at it stupidly. "I—must have lost it," he ventured.

The thoroughly enraged official grabbed Shalimar by the scruff of his coat in an undignified way, pulling the emergency cord with his other hand. He shoved the unfortunate man down the aisle of the car as the train slowed to a halt.

"Stop!" shouted Shalimar.

"Why?" grunted the conductor savagely, shoving him out the door as the speed of the train diminished. Shalimar landed on his hands and knees, rolled for several yards, and skidded to a halt on his stomach. He sat up and watched in exasperation as the train gathered speed and roared away into the darkness.

Finally he stood up, rubbing his head with one hand and feeling of his skinned knee with the other, and took stock of his surroundings. A moon in quarter phase illuminated dimly the gleaming lines of the railroad tracks, showed a tree in silhouette on a hill not far away. Clouds scudded across the sky. Shali-

mar endeavoured to ascertain where he was, gave up, and headed toward the hill and the silhouetted tree. In the far distance the whistle of a train wailed mournfully.

FROM the top of the hill Shalimar looked over a country of rolling plains and grainfields. A single light shone yellow about a half-mile off—probably a farm-house. Shalimar headed off toward the light, mentally cursing the monotonous chirping clamor of crickets and other nocturnal insects. He was trying to remember something—something of vital importance—something that he had to remember before it was too late. The memory hung there, just below the surface of conscious thought, defying him, taunting him. Eventually the lighted window showed clearly through a nearby grove of trees, and the outlines of a small farmhouse stood out against the dim sky.

He walked up the gravel path and knocked on the door. Steps sounded inside and the door opened, a crack of light shining out onto the ground. A face peered at him, withdrew, and the door opened wide. A figure stood silhouetted against the light.

"Come in," said Mr. 7.

"Oh, no!" Shalimar turned and started to run off. Mr. 7 grasped him firmly by the coat collar and dragged him back into the house.

"Let me go," gurgled Shalimar, gagging as his shirt collar pressed tightly against his throat.

"Not until—" Mr. 7 began, his face suddenly brightening. Footsteps, scraped up the gravel path and Messrs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 strode into the room. Mr. 3 expeditiously took the small, gray box from his pocket and handed it to Mr. 7. "Nowhere around here," he said briskly. "Probably off another psychological sidetrack."

Mr. 7's hand released Shalimar's coat-collar and poised over the red button on the right hand side of the box.

"Wait," cried Shalimar.

Mr. 7 depressed the button. Shalimar Smith disappeared from the room.

Mr. 7 then pressed the green button on the left hand side of the box. The Messrs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 vanished in like manner. The silent emptiness of the room was broken only by the sound of the bound and gagged farmer grunting from inside a handy closet.

SHALIMAR SMITH abruptly felt himself falling. He had just realized that fact when something cold, hard and wet slapped against his face and engulfed him, and he submerged gaspingly in the water. He came up, choking and treading water, and took his bearings.

He had just done a perfect jackknife from the high board of the public swimming pool in Stockton, Ohio. The quarter moon glinted faintly off the surface of the water. He was aware of the fact that he was still fully dressed, and that his clothes were soaking up water at an alarming rate, bearing him down.

He swam clumsily over to the edge of the pool and climbed out. Then he sat down on the edge and began contemplating this new facet of the whole fantastic experience. He knew the pool well enough—had swum in it many times when he had lived in this small town in Ohio, before getting married and going to New York.

The question of *how* he had gotten here bothered him not so much as *why* he had. Something was trying to come to the surface of his mind again—the same urgent something which had bothered him after he had been thrown off the train. He grasped at the memory, cursing as it eluded him deftly time and again. When footsteps sounded on the concrete walk leading to the pool he looked up.

It was a night watchman. The man was swinging a flashlight at his side, throwing the beam around him as he walked. Probably he had heard the splash and was coming to investigate. Shalimar sighed and stood up.

The flashlight beam swung toward

him, illuminating him embarrassingly and causing him to blink at the spot of white light before him. A suspicious voice asked, "What're you doin' here this time of night? Pool's closed."

"Yes, I know—" Shalimar thought hard. "I—was walking in my sleep and fell into the pool."

"With all your clothes on?" The beam of light lowered and Shalimar could see again. The watchman stood outlined against the darker trees, his face a blurred shadow.

"Yes, er—I fell asleep in my chair as I was reading the paper."

"Heh! At one o'clock in the morning? Where you live?"

Shalimar hadn't known it was so late. He racked his brains. "Just over the hill on Walnut Street."

The watchman stepped up and looked him over in the light of the flash. "Hmmm. Don't know you—must be new in town. You the one who bought the old Schultz place?"

"Why . . . yeah."

"Heh! Thought that was a woman. Well, I guess it's okay. Better watch where you wander off to at night, though."

"Yeah." Shalimar breathed a sigh of relief and began to walk off. "Good-night."

"Better take one of them anty-histamines when you get home. Sound like you're comin' down with a cold. Good-night!" The watchman strolled back toward his shack.

Shalimar gulped. Close. He began trying to remember again.

"Hey!" yelled the watchman suddenly. "Jest thought of somethin'. How'd you get into the pool? I'd've seen you if you come in the gate, and the other three sides is walled off!"

Shalimar had hoped the watchman wouldn't think of that. He began to run down the driveway.

"Wait up!" cried the watchman. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Shalimar ran. Three shots buzzed by him, then he was safely around the cor-

ner and away. He ducked down a tree-lined street, ran around the corner house and off across the back yard. Behind him he heard the man run on down the main street, yelling.

This was bad. The old fool would wake up the authorities, if not the whole town. Why did that damned button transport him into such messes? He ducked down an alley and into a small toolshed which he noticed at the end of it. What to do next? He stood in the shed, panting. As he backed up to the far wall, something brushed his face. A light cord! He pulled on it; the shed exploded into light.

Mr. 7 stood leaning against the far side of the shed, arms folded across chest. "Failed again," he remarked philosophically.

Shalimar leaped back with a cry.

The Messrs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, standing along the farther wall, murmured among themselves in interested tones.

"He was too many memory side-tracks," remarked Mr. 3, handing Mr. 7 the small gray box. "It certainly wasn't here. Nothing to do but try again." Mr. 7's finger hovered over the red button on the box's right-hand side.

Shalimar braced himself.

Mr. 7 shoved violently down on the button. Shalimar behaved in the expected fashion; he vanished.

Mr. 7 then pressed the green button on the left side. He and his colleagues followed after Shalimar.

IMMEDIATELY after Mr. 7 pressed the aforementioned red button, Shalimar Smith felt a violent pain on the top of his head, followed shortly by another. He deduced that somebody was beating him over the head with something.

"Peeping Tom!" shrieked the outraged woman. "Help! Police!" She poised the vase for another blow. Shalimar winced as it descended and took stock of where he was.

He found that he was hanging by his fingertips from a ledge about five stories up on an apartment building in what

must be a rather large city. It was, in fact, a window ledge, and immediately above him, leaning from the window, was a woman in a rather flimsy negligee, screaming and wielding a spiked heel on top of his defenseless cranium. He groaned as the heel descended for the fifth time on his skull then the shoe slipped from her grasp and fell to the street below. He remembered vaguely that he had once lived in an apartment like the one to whose window ledge he clung—probably, even, the same apartment—and that he had been accustomed to wash the windows from the outside. That explained his position. Now the shoe had been replaced by another makeshift weapon. A goldfish bowl came down upon him, showering him with fish, water and splinters of glass. Below, a cruising precinct police car had stopped and several men sporting the blue uniform of the Law were looking up.

"Come down from there," demanded a wrathful voice from below.

"How?" gasped Shalimar weakly.

"Come down, I say!" shouted the voice. Several people in adjoining apartments were looking out their respective windows at the scene and thoroughly enjoying his discomfiture. Shalimar cursed them and edged his way along the ledge until he felt another one under his feet. He came to a standing position on the lower one, hugging the wall of the building. The lady in the negligee poised a vase of flowers preparatory to heaving at him.

"Hell!" groaned Shalimar, ducking as the vase shattered against the wall above his head. He edged his way around the corner of the building where the lady could no longer see him, and slipped into an open window.

A man lay sleeping in the apartment he had just entered. Praying that the man was a heavy sleeper, Shalimar tiptoed through the apartment and out into the hall. By now, he imagined, the place was a bedlam. The elevator was coming up—loaded with police, no doubt—and

footsteps were ascending the stairs. Shalimar spotted a weathered door and ducked through it.

He emerged on the roof. Looking over the edge, he was immediately spotted from below. Cries of, "There he is!" and "On the roof!" floated to his horrified ears. He ran across the room and jumped to an adjoining one. He zig-zagged across it, keeping well away from the edges, and reached yet another adjoining roof. There he popped into a small utility shed. Stairs led down, and Shalimar followed them, not bothering to worry where they went. He raced down six flights and emerged in the basement.

Dark—too dark to see anything—but there was no mistaking that voice.

"Wrong again," said Mr. 7 cheerfully.

Shalimar couldn't see, but he knew that Mr. 7 was pressing the small red button. There was not enough light for anybody to see that Shalimar had once more vanished.

APPARENTLY, nothing had happened. Shalimar waited expectantly. The darkness was as blank as ever. Shalimar looked about him, felt the air about him. Nothing. He took several steps forward.

BAM!

Shalimar fell back. No mistaking that rough surface. He had just bumped into a tree. Cautiously, he approached it again, feeling in front of him with his hands. Presently he encountered the rough bark; he could put his arms around the tree. He felt upward—and got a surprise.

It was broken off at the top—rather, burnt or charred off.

"Why?"

His memory went to work again. He was getting closer now, much closer. Something was coming to the surface of his conscious mind, something that he had to remember, something—

He noticed then that it was lighter. A wind was blowing, the sky showed palely overhead. Clouds were obscuring the

stars and moon. Vague outlines of other blasted trees showed against the dull sky. The ground wasn't the way ground *should* be . . . glassy . . . hard . . .

He knew this place. But where? When?

Then he saw it, the tall thing, cylindrical and with a pointed nose shoved at the sky. He began to remember, though it came slowly. He thought, the tall thing, with a tapered nose silhouetted against the sky, was . . .

Home.

I PRESUME you have by now broken away from the limitations of your disintegrating Earth-personality," said a familiar voice.

Mr. 7! And he *knew* Mr. 7!

"When we arrived—almost twenty years ago—in the role of a Galactic study-group assigned to determine whether the planet Earth was yet fit for full Galactic citizenship," said Mr. 7 slowly "we found it necessary to assume the roles, separately, of representative beings of Earth, in order to obtain what information we required without arousing suspicion. To do this it was necessary, through standard psychological procedure, to isolate the larger portion of our complete Galactic personalities and to leave only a small pseudopersonality, completely equipped with Earth-memories, under which guise we might proceed with our studies.

"In order to assure complete control of the Earth personality, it was of course necessary to isolate the Galactic one completely and further to remove all knowledge of its existence until such a predetermined time as we would be finished with our work and ready to return home."

Mr. 7 droned on. Shalimar nodded—and remembered.

"Our study of Earth now being finished, we shall return to our headquarters. We could not return, however, until we located the ship in which we had come—and *you* were the key to that."

Shalimar remembered now. He was ... he was. . . .

"You gave us a rather hard time," continued Mr. 7.

"Because my personality was the most psychologically malleable," Shalimar said slowly, "I was chosen to hide the ship where it would be safe until we required it. The seven of you teleported to the Earth's surface and waited while I hid the ship—where you did not know its location. Then I alone knew where the ship was, and because I was the most malleable, my Earth-personality was the most foolproof. Therefore it was extremely unlikely that in any moments of duress or psychological strain, I would

babble the location of the ship—which it was imperative to guard."

"But," said Mr. 7, "your Earth-personality was *too* well-integrated. The location of the ship was locked somewhere in your subconscious and wouldn't come out. The only thing we could do was teleport you to various places in your memory, stimulating your Galactic Personality each time, and hope that eventually you would lead us to the ship."

"Which," said Shalimar, "I did."

"Which you did," agreed Mr. 7. "Are we ready, then, to take off, Captain?"

"We are ready, Lieutenant," said Shalimar Smith, otherwise—Mr. Zero.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

pheric envelope to operate in space. When that happens you won't hear about it for quite a while, but it'll happen.

Letters From Our Readers

THE ENGINEERS

by J. Martin Graetz

Dear Sam: I was going to start this letter by saying that I had found the formula for getting my letters printed in TWS, but I guess that's a sure way to keep 'em out. Still, it got me to thinking. How *do* people get their letters printed? Came up with several alternatives:

For instance, "... This is the first time I've ever written to an s-t-f magazine ..." but Sam knows that I've been around longer than that. Of course, I could use a pseudo, like Michael Wigodsky, or Rick Sneary.

With Merwin, one could always use, "... I know damn well you won't print this, because it's ..." but if you say that to Mines, he's liable to go and leave it out just to be funny.

Or you can appeal like this: "... I have been stationed here in these desolate sand hills for nearly fifteen years, and the only mail I get is when the egg man comes from Omaha every six months. It's only been recently that I have persuaded him to bring a few stf mags, and then they're the British Editions. I'd send a subscription, but I can't trust him past Grand Island ..."

Or, "... when does TWS get trimmed edges/better type/slicker paper/Finlay on the cover/more

letters/fewer letters/more Schomburg/no Schomburg/more girls on the covers/men on the covers/etc/etc/etc/& etc ..."

Of course, the easiest way is to say, "... I liked your editorial in the — TWS ..."

To the wars.

I sort of liked your editorial in the Nov. TWS. Got a point there.

Seems Popp can do two kinds of covers, terrific and lousy. This was the former kind. I like symbolics when they are done well.

By the way, Sam, in the new issue of Writer's Digest, you said that the women outnumber the men letter-writers. No kidding? What is the world coming to what?

Is Pace an author or a fan? Seems I've read a story or two ...

I would love to get into a theological argument with T. Pace.

Phil Pharmer: That explanation sounds just a little too pat. I think Bradley just jumped the gun on you.

Sam, I know you'll ignore Anderson's plea. SS and TWS are the only stfmags worth anything that don't have science-fiction or fantasy in their titles. Keep it that way.

Cox, you only eight ... teen? Gosh Sam, she's younger'n me. Now why did I have to go and enroll at MIT when I could have gone to Iowa State and been in closer proximity than I am here in Omaha, or even THOMPSON? (Work that syntag out for yourself, sir)

C. McKinney: so it does, so it does.

GOSH-A-MICKLE DICKLE-PICKLE GEE WILLY-WOBBLES and RROWBBAZZLE!!!!

Hasn't nobody ever heard about GEORGE R. STEWART, AUTHOR OF

EARTH ABIDES

?

The last-man-and-woman-survivors-who-are-the-

founders-of-a-new-people-in-Northern-California-theme has been done masterfully and finally by Stewart in the aforementioned epic. Why is it that a short like Springer's NO LAND OF NOD, which is still kicking around TRS after too long a time, gets such a buildup of taboo-shattering impact, when it isn't the first after all? Granted it was a good story, but it just wasn't *that* terrific.

I'll let you off easy this time, Sam'l, with one query. If you follow POGO in the daily paper, did you notice that very clever bit about a month back with Owl and the flying saucer from South Mars? It's things like that, isn't it?

I've already had works from Clarkson, Mines, in case you were wondering. Bye bye.—420 Memorial Drive, Mass. Inst. of Tech., Cambridge, 32, Mass.

Glad you realize that you can't get letters printed in TWS just by needling ye ed. Otherwise I can't seem to find anything to fight with you about. How'd you get into M.I.T.?

LA GUILLOTINE

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Dear Sam: By this time everybody's finished jumping down my throat over my views on birth-control, both in the pages of SS and TWS, and in personal letters (as I expected, I got all sorts of poison-pen letters from young females who believed themselves eminently qualified to judge for themselves how many children they ought to have, and resented my implications that their squallings might be motivated by selfishness) and I think I should say a few words in rebuttal, after which, as far as I'm concerned, the subject is closed.

I think that today's women have an attitude which could be summed up as follows: "We women will accept our biological limitations—with reservations." Now, this isn't a new attitude—women have been making mental reservations about their femaleness since the days of Sappho. But the new thing is the American attitude that this qualified acceptance is a good or desirable thing.

I think that when a young woman—or for that matter a young man—tries to decide for himself or herself how many children he/she should have, she takes on herself a responsibility which nothing in her conditioning has fitted her to assume. The modern girl of 18 or 20 is not emotionally or mentally mature enough to make decisions of this kind; her decisions are mostly made on a basis of pure emotion, and are on the same emotional level as the little girl of seven, playing dolls, who says "I want three little babies." The girl of eighteen or nineteen who says "I want two children, no more," or the girl of twenty-five who has four children and says "that's enough," is making a decision without full knowledge of the physical and psychological factors involved. Until humanity is conditioned to make this kind of decision, the individual responsibility assumed only sows the seeds of mental conflict and physical disruption.

In this century, and the one before it, humanity has (pardon my platitude), lost touch with Nature. Along with that, we seem to have lost touch with sex as a clean and impersonal natural force, and tied it up with a lot of adolescent emotions better

suited to a high-school production of Romeo and Juliet, than to the continuance of the human race. Nature often blunders badly in her work of continuing humanity, but nature does NOT blunder as badly as the eighteen-year-old newlywed girl with a headful of contraceptive information.

Like it or not, America is swinging, slowly but surely, toward a matriarchy—and decadence. Women, in their present emotional muddle, are NOT SUITED to assume important positions in the commanding of the world, but they are doing it.

What is the answer? If I knew that, I'd have to be Albert Einstein, Margaret Chase Smith, Dr. Kinsey, an electric computing machine, and Madame Blavatsky, all rolled up into one. I believe there are two ways out. One way is for America to start educating her women to *take* the responsibility they are demanding, and to do it with a real, not an emotional rebellious feeling of their biological limitations.

The other answer—and my personal preference—is for today's generation of mental eunuchs to recover their lost manhood and give today's women a good swift kick in the seat of their mass-produced slacks!

To paraphrase Lincoln, I say this with the greater freedom being a woman myself.

Now let the feathers fly.—Box 246, Rochester, Texas.

Being strictly an umpire ourselves, we have no real craving to get into this argument. Also we have a feeling that there is no definitive answer to the question of how many children a woman should have. Bradley rules out the parents themselves deciding. If they, therefore take no precautions, theoretically a woman could have a child every year for twenty years or until she broke under the strain. Since comparatively few couples have as many as twenty children, some restraining factor is in operation. What? Blind chance? And who decides that?

And just incidentally, Marion, why do you want America's males to deliver that swift kick to the seat of woman's mass-produced slacks?

A LITTLE GARLIC

by Pat Kovacs

Dear Sam: Hadn't expected to write to you again, but here I am. It was Sid Sullivan's letter in November TWS that brought me back.

All I can say is that any woman who holds such theories is either not married, married but isn't impressed by her husband enough to care one way or the other, or has never come up against a "little" infidelity. In other words, it's good theory, but try putting it in practice.

The thought has also occurred to me that Fandom has no legendary myths. The lumbermen had Paul Bunyan, there was Pecos Bill of the West, not to mention John Henry of the railroads and the little-known Joe Magarac of the steel mills. Why not a fan along the same lines? From what I have seen, the exploits of such a character needn't necessarily be fiction. People don't believe fans

exist anyway. (Distinguishing people from fans.)
Only problem is to think of an appropriate name.
—119 N. Sulphur Street, Middletown, Ohio.

Before any feathers start to fly on this warm topic, let's take in some of the other dissenters, like:

THE MORE TOLERANT SEX

by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: What's this? Winding up the Year-of-the-Only-Five-TWS with another very outstanding short? Hmmm. The author's name has been slightly kicked around, so how about letting us know who *really* gets the credit for THE LAST DAME? (What's that? You thought I'd be raving about THE TRANSPROSED MAN? Almost, but not the way you think. Stories of that type run into the cynical cycles too deeply for true enjoyment.)

And speaking of cynicism, let's consider Sid Sullivan as a—sordid?—example. Just because her "egotistical, inconsiderate, work-creating pest" strayed slightly one night while he was out with the boys, forgetfully bringing home the damaging evidence: 1 handkerchief liberally smeared with orange lipstick,—she thinks that everyone feels the same way about "a little infidelity." Ho-hum and what this country needs is a tidal wave of Victorianism, and all that. Too bad TRS is so boring for her that she has to stir the ant-heap a trifle.

Didn't we just dispose of Deek the Geeck, with his so helpful suggestions and declarations and some other frustrated femme—or was that in SS? One big happy family, and Sam in his *not*-coveted role of overseer and referee. And he sits back in his padded cell—oops, *chair*—and gleefully tosses in the juiciest rabble rousers. Never a dull moment.

Oh, yes—Mrs. Sullivan will read MISSION TO MIZAR and let us all know that "Isn't that just like a man, the cad? But we love 'em anyway, bless 'em!" And maybe she can rescue a few morsels of dignity to let me know just why the female sex is supposed to be more tolerant than men? Maybe it's because they get more practice, does she think? Ok, someone else can carry the ball for awhile now—

Again Pat Jones does things up right with her movie review of Spaceways. Just happened to see it the other night, and must say that the human element and emotions leaped right out of the picture, unlike several other so-called adult stf movies slinking around lately.

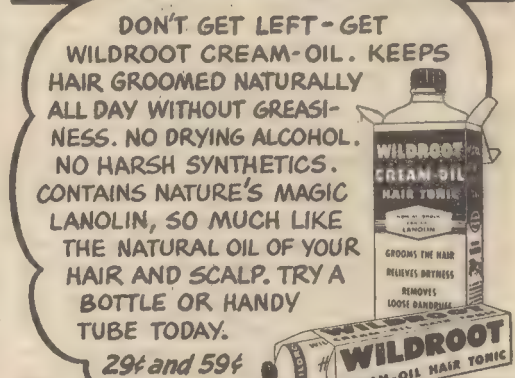
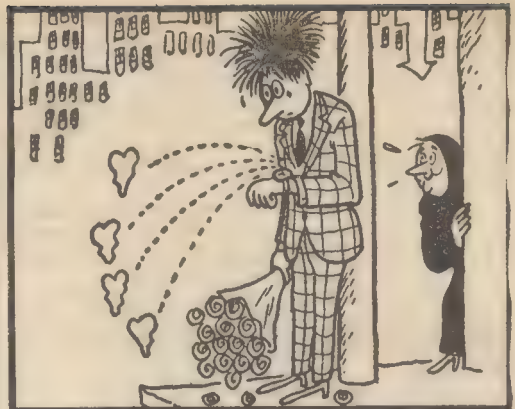
Back to TRS—li'l Vinegar Dave must have eagerly latched onto the piece in the newspaper the other night where Kinsey is regretting all over the place that he didn't interview Polly Adler while collecting material for his Book. Cheer up, boy, maybe he's contemplating a sequel.

Hi, Marian Cox! You happy about the Nov. TWS cover now? So you want to have a pic of Sam in TWS or SS, too?

Say Sam—if enough peoples (fen *are* people, you hope)—anyway, if enough wrote in and asked for a big pic of you on the inside or outside, do you—aah—think it *might* could be arranged??? Hmmm? Of course I'm Sirius!

Your editorial was very interesting, Sam, very

[Turn page]



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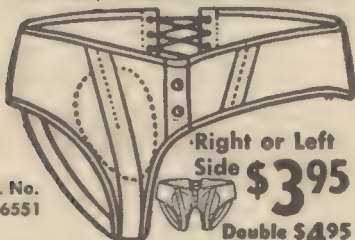
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well thought out and written. Oops!—stand back everyone and give him air—the excitement was too much. Bricks he can dodge but not compliments! —385 No. 8th East St., Provo, Utah.

Well, anyway, the more tolerant sex is not so tolerant of Sullivan's tolerance. Regarding this matter of a "little infidelity," let us remember that what Mrs. Sullivan implied was that there were worse things than that. Now if your moral code holds that infidelity is worse than murder, or brutality or torture you are obviously going to feel about it like many people feel about garlic—there is no such thing as a little. But if you would rather be deceived than murdered you may feel differently about it. Not that this is the only choice you have—we were merely talking about extremes.

You may have another full-fledged war on your hands trying to justify your belief that women are more tolerant. Maybe they are, maybe they are. They've had more practice forgiving men than vice-versa, no doubt. But they claim to operate on intuition rather than reason and we wonder what kind of intuition governs tolerance?

SANDPAPER

by M. Desmond Emery

Dear Sam: How do you do it, Sam? I mean, get all those fen raving and gnashing their teeth. I write, of course, of the November TWS. Specifically, "The Reader Speaks," although it's more like "The Reader Shrieks." What a mess. Think I'll stay out of it this trip and just comment on the stories.

Dwight Swain wrote a pretty good story with THE TRANPOSED MAN, although I feel that vanVogt could have done better with a plot like that. K. F. Crossen wrote, as usual, a highly entertaining yarn. Personally, I like Manning Draco better married than I did single. Don't know just why, but that's the way it goes. Let Crossen put in all the footnotes he wants—they're real amusing. And boy, dig those crazy names he thinks up! Depro Fundis. Par Egzanpl. Freud Eggs. Laughed myself Silly. Nothing I appreciate like a good pun. The short stories are, again, of mixed quality. THE LAST DAME, and TRANSFER, poor. GREEN THUMB, and DR. LIGHTNING, good. The verse was also good. By the way, keep the poetry, and also your short comment at the beginning of each novel or novelette. Interesting. And that takes care of that. Well, what do you know? All that's left to talk about is letters! And I have half a page left to fill. Sometimes I wish that I had never started this business of "writing to the Editor". Once in, you can't get out. Ah well, that's the way it goes, again.

But to get on to the letters. "Vinegar Dave" Mason is indeed gloomy, but he makes a cogent point. If I remember my ancient history correctly, one of the main causes of the fall of the Roman Empire was the laxity of morals among the popu-

lace. I'm not suggesting that the Roman Empire is anything like the American Empire or that Roman manners and morals are like American manners and morals, but if the shoe fits. . . .

Norman Clarke makes an interesting point in his letter when he says there's no solution to religious discussions. When a person is convinced of his rightness, he is quite willing to argue about it—and he's not likely to be converted by his opponent, either. This applies to religion, politics, sex, and even to the merits of "Traditional" versus "Modern" art. But there's no harm trying, and there is a lot of fun involved in trying to shake "unassailable" beliefs, when you stop short of inviting your opponent to meet you at dawn and "name his own weapon." And there's nothing like a heated discussion to bring your own opinions and beliefs to crystallization, and clear away the cobwebs.

I'm just going to pass over Sid Sullivan's letter. I'm just about speechless. What kind of a wife is she? . . . "just a little infidelity". Hah! While I'm here, I feel constrained to make a comment on the Kinsey Report. I'm lifting this straight from MacLean's, by the way. The women he interviewed would obviously have been the more or less uninhibited type. So all he proved is that women who have pre- or extra-marital relations are uninhibited.

And last of all is the condensed column, where I always look first for my letter, but at least my name is there. Somebody liked your editorial at last? But Sam, dear boy, I always liked your eds. It's just that I never got around to saying so. (Too busy yakking about the stories and letters, I guess.)

And what's this? Oh, the back cover. I better leave.—93 Hemlock Street, St. Thomas, Ont. Canada.

What do you mean, Kinsey interviewed the uninhibited type? Just answering questions doesn't make them uninhibited does it? Don't forget most of them answered "no." Only 26% admitted to being uninhibited—you're assuming that they were *all* guilty of some indiscretion when that isn't what resulted at all. And on Kinsey's findings I don't see how you can gripe about the downfall of morals in the American Empire. Fact, we're about the only country in the world which makes a fetish of romantic love, fidelity, etc. Don't know how well it works out, but our writers, advertising moguls, song writers, playwrights and what have you are sure busy selling it.

ANTIDOTE

by Sandor Esterhazy

Dear Sam: About two years ago I sent you a one-shot fan mag called THE ILLUMINATI—whether it was reviewed or not I do not know. But of one thing I can assure you—this mag was received with astonishment when distributed underground in the U.S.S.R.

But this is not my reason for writing, breaking a lifetime rule in relation to science fiction. It is to applaud your editorial of August, 1953, where

[Turn page]

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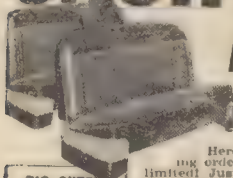
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you state "speculation is what science fiction represents much more than prophecy." It is because of this stress on speculation-probability that I read such rather than for any prophetic liability.

Therefore I have a legitimate gripe when your STARTLING STORIES has "Today's Science Fiction—Tomorrow's Fact" on the front page. Personally I would prefer your slogan, "Scientificity at its best."

But perhaps I am prejudiced since all this kind of writing to me is an antidote from the nefarious wiles of dogmatism and conformity. Whether it be Communism or otherwise. And the good Lord knows we need plenty such. It has been my observation that where science fiction is most popular there Communism with its one-track mind is weakest. Whether you know it or not a reader of your magazine in one of the Soviet nations would be considered a counter revolutionary, a bourgeois decadent, an intellectual pervert and suffering from mental instability. The Communist denies there is either speculation or probability as to the future.

May I compliment you on your ability or rather restraint from trying to make all writers write in your image. It is true that at times your writers have not the polish of some of the so-called aristocrats of our media. But they do possess something which only a little artistic crudeness can bring, namely originality and identity. They are not copies of each other, each a mirror of the editor's mind.

It is for this reason that after reading science fiction for more than fifty years that more and more I restrict myself to buying your two mags on the newsstand.— 1027 West 8th Place, Los Angeles, 17, Cal.

Apparently Communists recognize science fiction as a threat to dogma, since it is in official disfavor. As you say, this is one of the highest compliments one could pay it, that the advocates of the mailed fist and the dungeon are against it.

And as for the other compliment that more and more you read our magazines alone—well, what can we say, being filled with pride?

CORRECTION

by Thomas H. DeBaryshe

Dear SM: No, it wasn't Teddy Roosevelt; it was Thomas Carlyle. And the quotation goes "Never explain and never apologize; your friends don't need it and your enemies won't believe it."

Your stories are amazingly well chosen. I must assume your publications are read by others besides your ever-happy fan. Good luck.—Westport, N. Y.

Thanks—always wanted to know who said it. Actually I don't buy its sentiments 100%, but it is one of those quips which always reads well when you need it.

More letters than space, as usual, so we'll try and squeeze in as many as possible in the rundown . . . Bob Farnham, 204 Mountain View Drive, Dalton, Ga., defends Phil Farmer, says

he sang tenor and baritone himself over WJKS, Gary Indiana. Jerry Megahan, 9644 Naomi Ave., Arcadia, Cal., says the average American female is not looking for love, she is looking for someone to lose her inhibitions with. What kind girls you know, Jerry? Joe Keogh, 63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont., Canada bemoans the dearth of the "regulars" in TRS, but will settle for good letters, even by new names.

Paul Mittelbuscher, AF 17376007, Box 5783-F, 3354th Student Squadron, Chanute AFB, Ill. is looking for more correspondents. Ray Thompson, 410 South 4th St., Norfolk, Nebraska, tees off on book burners. John Walston, Vashon, Wash., gripes because he has to wade through a lot of love and confession mags to get to TWS. Hank Moskowitz, Three Bridges, N.J. decides he likes the pulp format, trimmed, better than digest or large-size after all.

Rev. C. M. Moorhead, Community Church, Kelley's Island, Ohio, disagrees with Tom Pace in saying that people can hold views without being militant about them. Make fun of anyone's faith and see what happens. Betty Pope, 1237 E. Briar Ave., Provo, Utah, met Carol McKinney through this column, though both live in a small town and is properly grateful. Janice Searles is abashed at how a single sentence from her letter looked out of context. Sorry, Janice, no one else thought so. Her address is 24121 Kraft Place, RR #3, Romulus, Mich., if you want to write her a comforting word.

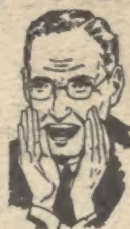
George W. Earley, 507 Castle Drive, Apt. D, Baltimore, 12, Md., didn't like the November issue nohow. Fred Seegmueller, East Markle St., Philadelphia 28, Pa., would like to see a reader poll for the favorite story of each issue. Del Palmer is still worrying over whether Kuttner is Vance. Down, boy, down. Beverly A. Bees, 19 Lenore St., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Can. has just discovered TWS and LIKES it. Richard L. St. Onge, 3170 Stickney Ave., Toledo, 8, Ohio, wants to collaborate with Benny L. Fitzgerald. Lee Huddleston Route 1, Baird, Texas, presents a belated appreciation of NO LAND OF NOD.

Steve Steyn, Plot 43, Nancefield, P.O. Klip-town, Transvaal, South Africa, wants stf mags badly, will pay postage if fans will send him some. Dick Clarkson, c/o Harvard U., Leverett H-33, Cambridge 38, Mass., sends us a picture of himself and Joe Keogh. Fortunately we never even try to reproduce pictures. Ugh. R. Terry Beals wants the names and address

[Turn page]

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of all Kansas fen to help the fen clubs grow, but since he didn't put any address on his letter your guess is as good as mine as to where to send them.

Ron Smith, 332 East Date, Oxnard, Cal., plugs a new fanzine called **INSIDE**. Will give away sample copies. Sgt. Harold Herzberg, RR. #2, Butler, Ind. wants to give away all his old stf mags—first come first served. Roberta Stuart, 1044 S. Monroe St., Green Bay, Wisc., thinks we are invulnerable because we are well coated with mail—ouch. She's just paying us back for "half aloof is better than none." Says we'll be the death of her yet and no jury would convict us. Gosh, we hope not.

Sheldon J. Deretchin, 1234 Utica Ave., Brooklyn, 3, N.Y. moans that we never print his letters. You know why? If we do you write more. G. W. Graser, Box 2927, Dallas, Texas, takes issue with the writers of angry letters concerning a story's moral's. The only point of criticism, he maintains, is over the story's probability, possibility or plausibility. If you don't like its morals, forget it. Mrs. Pansy Olmstead, Rt. 1, Box 283 A, Nevada City, Cal. likes our answers to the letters. A fan, at last. Whereas Georgina Ellis, 1428-15th St. East Calgary, Alberta, Canada, thinks we are slipping in that respect—starting to sound like the letters themselves. Eek.

Walter Becker, 41 Market Avenue, Vereeniging, Transvaal, South Africa would like to get the names of some good hard cover books and where they are obtainable. And last is one—we can't figure out the first name, but the last is Darleen, G.L.R.O., Grand Valley P.O., Ontario wants correspondents with a kind of private TWS reader club in mind. And that's all from us.

—THE EDITOR

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